

ABSTRACT

AN EVALUATION OF THE ALPHA COURSE AS A CATALYST FOR FAITH TRANSFORMATION

by

Stephen Brian Yeich

Many churches not only struggle with reaching their communities for Christ, but also in helping to move persons to a deeper level of faith. Many have a faith that is primarily intellectual assent to Christian principles, yet inwardly they remain separated from God. Others profess Christian beliefs and confess Jesus as Lord, but they do not live out their faith in daily thoughts, words, and deeds. This study researched the impact the Alpha Course had on participants as it pertained to faith commitment and a transformation in their faith. This transformation was determined by analyzing participants' changes in their love of God and love of neighbor.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

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AN EVALUATION OF THE ALPHA COURSE
AS A CATALYST FOR FAITH TRANSFORMATION

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of
Asbury Theological Seminary

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Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by

Stephen Brian Yeich

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CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The Problem

In the winter of 2000, the evangelism team from Broadmoor United Methodist Church attended the Alpha Conference held in New Orleans, Louisiana. As the Pastor of Evangelism at Broadmoor, I had been considering Alpha as a possible new venture to reach our community. The Alpha Course is a ten-week course on the basics of Christianity. Each week includes a meal, a talk (either presented on video or given by a leader), and a small group discussion. The conference convinced Broadmoor's leadership that Alpha would provide a powerful new tool to reach the unchurched people of our community. As Alpha was implemented, we discovered that, in addition to being an effective outreach tool, Alpha was leading persons who were a part of the church to deeper levels of faith.

One struggle in many churches is how to enable persons to grow in faith. Many people intellectually accept Christian principles, yet inwardly they remain separated from God. Others profess Christian beliefs and confess Jesus as Lord, but they fail to live out their faith in their daily thoughts, words, and deeds. George Barna, in an article published on his Web site, describes the difficulty differentiating between Christians and non-Christians:

[V]ery few American Christians have experienced a sense of spiritual brokenness that compelled them to beg God for His mercy and acceptance through the love of Christ. We have a nation of "Christians" who took the best offer, but relatively few who were so humiliated and hopeless before a holy and omnipotent God that they cried out for undeserved compassion. That helps to explain why in practical terms it's hard to tell the difference between those who have beliefs that characterize them as born again and those who don't; the difference between the two groups is based on semantics more than a desperate plea for grace

that triggered an intentional effort to live a transformed life.

This lack of differentiation between Christians and non-Christians demonstrates the challenge to today's church leadership.

The book of James addresses those who lack outward expression of their faith:

Dear brothers and sisters, what's the use of saying you have faith if you don't prove it by your actions? That kind of faith can't save anyone. Suppose you see a brother or sister who needs food or clothing, and you say, "Well, good-bye and God bless you; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?

So you see, it isn't enough just to have faith. Faith that doesn't show itself by good deeds is no faith at all—it is dead and useless. (Jas. 2:14-17, NLT)

James alleges that faith without works is dead. Sadly, many persons who attend churches have a dead faith; they may confess Jesus as Lord and Savior on Sunday, but they do not go the next step of walking by that faith in daily living. Former church participants who no longer attend often live out this same pattern of "faith" that has no real expression in their daily lives.

The first believers expressed their faith by worshipping together (Acts 2:42), sharing with one another (Acts 2:44), caring for those in need (Acts 2:45) and evangelizing (Acts 6:7) all through the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:42, 44, 45; 6:7). All of these expressions of faith found their inspiration and power through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Church congregations typically include persons who equate being a Christian with living a moral life and abstaining from sinful behavior. John Wesley calls these persons "almost Christian." He states that Christians must believe with their heads that the Scriptures are true, but they must also possess a trust and confidence in God:

The right and true Christian faith is, (to go on in the words of our own Church,) not only to believe that holy Scripture and the articles of our faith are true, but also to have a sure trust and confidence to be saved from everlasting damnation by Christ. It is a sure trust and confidence which a man hath in God, that, by the merits of Christ, his sins are forgiven, and he reconciled to the favor of God; whereof doth follow a loving heart, to obey his commandments. (Works of John Wesley 5: 87)

Wesley also describes this heart condition as having the “faith of a servant” rather than the “faith of a son.” In his sermon, “On the Discoveries of Faith,” he addresses this need for a change in faith:

Exhort him to press on, by all possible means, till he passes “from faith to faith”; from the faith of a servant to the faith of a son; from the spirit of bondage unto fear, to the spirit of childlike love: He will then have “Christ revealed in his heart,” enabling him to testify, “The life that I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me,”—the proper voice of a child of God. He will then be “born of God”; inwardly changed by the mighty power of God, from “an earthly, sensual, devilish” mind, to the “mind which was in Christ Jesus.” (7: 250)

Wesley’s description of this transformation is holistic. The change is an inward and outward transformation and includes the mind and the heart.

The book of Acts reveals that the transformation of lives from the inside out by the power of the Holy Spirit was the normative experience of those in the early Church. Paul’s conversion vividly describes this change in Acts 9:

So Ananias went and found Saul. He laid his hands on him and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, has sent me so that you may get your sight back and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Instantly something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized. Afterward he ate some food and was strengthened. Saul stayed with the believers in Damascus for a few days. And immediately he began preaching about Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is indeed the Son of God!” (Acts 9:17-20)

As Saul the Pharisee, Paul was devoted to the letter of the Law, and he was intensely persecuting Christians. Saul was zealously following God, but his

convictions about God were wrong. Paul's transformation did not occur until his encounter with Jesus Christ on the Damascus road.

As Alpha was implemented at Broadmoor United Methodist Church (UMC), I noticed persons who had previously been on the sidelines of the church now assumed leadership in Alpha and in other church ministries. These participants also began to minister to others in their family, work, and community contexts. One participant observed, "The course brought out the best in me, and supplemented my faith. I am more likely now to freely discuss religion with others. I felt comfortable expressing my own beliefs with the group I was with" (Broadmoor United Methodist). Another person remarked, "Alpha has brought me closer to God. I learned a lot about Christianity and how I need to apply it to my family. My faith has grown and my relationship with my family has grown stronger" (Broadmoor United Methodist). Alpha seemed to have a significant impact on persons who had been on the periphery of the church and helped them to grow in faith.

Persons were also observed who lived a Christian lifestyle but lacked a deep relationship with God. One person stated, "I was always somewhat unsure of God forgiving my sins, but through this course, I feel closer to God and believe that my sins are forgiven." Alpha was introduced at Broadmoor primarily as an evangelism strategy, and it seemed to emerge as a catalyst for faith transformation in persons who were at various points in their faith journey.

The purpose of the study was to determine the effectiveness of Alpha in helping to bring people to a faith commitment in Jesus Christ and in helping people experience faith transformation.

Theological Foundations

A powerful theme running throughout the doctrine of conversion or faith transformation is the Holy Spirit. God is the initiator of the conversion process and the Holy Spirit is the agent through whom God transforms people. The book of Acts reveals the Holy Spirit was an active participant in the apostles' ministry; he gave them the power to preach the message of Christ. The Spirit also lays the groundwork so that those who will receive the message are adequately prepared in heart and mind. As the word is proclaimed, the Spirit works to convince, convict, and transform the hearts and minds of the hearers. Finally, the Spirit comes to dwell within new believers giving them the power to live the new life they have been given.

Thomas Oden describes the Holy Spirit's role in personal conversion within the context of the sequence of salvation. First, the Spirit works to restrain sin in the lives of individuals and provides an opportunity for repentance. Secondly, the Holy Spirit convicts persons of their sin awakening them to their sinful condition and then leads those persons to repentance. The Spirit enables faith in an individual giving those persons the ability to respond with trust in Jesus Christ. Faith then leads to a spiritual regeneration by the power of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit indwells the believers. In the baptism of the Spirit, the individuals die to their old way of life and are reborn to the new. The Holy Spirit then confirms the living word in the hearts of believers and assures individuals that they are children of God. As the Spirit fills believers, they begin to express holiness of heart and life. Finally, the Holy Spirit works in people to bring about sanctification (Life 83).

Paul's theology also seems to point to conversion as the progressive work

of the Holy Spirit. Gordon D. Fee lays this argument out in three parts: the Holy Spirit's role in hearing the gospel, the Holy Spirit's role in conversion, the Holy Spirit's role in living out conversion (76-122).

For Paul, hearing the gospel is the catalyst for beginning the Christian life; the Spirit is intimately involved in this process. Fee states that "[t]wo things are involved: the gospel as God's very word that must be believed, revealed as such by the Spirit; and the dual act of preaching and responding, which are also the work of the spirit" (76).

Preaching is made effective by the power and work of the Spirit, not by the eloquence of the proclamation. The Spirit evokes a deep conviction in the hearer that is many times accompanied by other signs of the Spirit's power. The mystery of God is unveiled by the power of the Holy Spirit in the act of proclamation. In 1 Corinthians 2:6-16, Paul describes the Spirit revealing this mystery of the redemption of humanity by a crucified Messiah to those with the Spirit. In contrast, those without the Spirit remain ignorant (Fee 79-80).

Paul sees conversion through the metaphors of adoption, washing or rebirth, and sanctification. In the image of adoption, "[t]he experience of the Spirit leads the believer not only to a position of justification before God, but [this experience] also should lead to an ongoing awareness of the privileges of childhood—personal relationship and companionship with God himself" (Fee 91). In the washing or rebirth image, "The only coming to Christ known to Paul is one in which the life of the believer has been invaded by the life-giving Spirit, who both applies the redemptive work of the cross and also transforms us from within, by the 'renewing of your mind' (Rom. 12:2, NIV)" (Fee 93). Finally, in the image of sanctification, "Paul's primary use of the term 'sanctification' is also as

a figure of speech for conversion, not a reference to a work of grace following conversion” (93).

Paul sees the power of the Spirit continuing to work in the life of the believer by enabling the person to live a new life in Christ by walking in the Spirit:

For Paul, “holiness,” that is, walking by means of the Holy Spirit, has two aspects. On the one hand it means abstaining from some sins—absolutely. On the other hand, “holiness” also means the Holy Spirit living in believers, reproducing the life of Christ within and among them, particularly in their communal relationships. (Fee 109)

The work of the Spirit continues to enable the process of transformation in the life of the believer.

Wesley summarizes his belief concerning the power of the Holy Spirit in “A Letter to a Roman Catholic”:

I believe in the infinite and eternal Spirit of God, equal with the Father and the Son, to be not only perfectly holy in himself, but the immediate cause of all holiness in us: enlightening our understandings, rectifying our wills and affections, renewing our natures, uniting our persons to Christ, assuring us of the adoption of sons, leading us in our actions, purifying and sanctifying our souls and bodies to a full and eternal enjoyment of God. (Letters 3: 9)

For Wesley the preparatory work of the Spirit is crucial to the personal conversion of people. This process begins with God’s prevenient grace reaching out to unbelievers and preparing them to receive the message of salvation. As they receive the message, the Spirit works to convict and enable the hearers to respond by repenting from sin. Persons are then ready to hear and receive the good news of God’s grace. The Spirit enables the person to trust in God’s word of grace given through Christ. Finally, the individual is brought into the family of God by the power of the Spirit (Oden, John Wesley’s Scriptural Christianity

223).

Theology and Background of Alpha

The Alpha Course is a basic introduction to Christianity, designed to be effective in reaching unchurched people. The topics addressed by Alpha include

- Christianity: Boring, Untrue, and Irrelevant?
- Who is Jesus?
- Why Did Jesus Die?
- How Can I Be Sure of My Faith?
- Why and How Should I Read the Bible?
- Why and How Do I Pray?
- How Does God Guide Us?
- Who is the Holy Spirit
- What Does the Holy Spirit Do?
- How Can I Be Filled with the Spirit?
- How Can I Resist Evil?
- Why and How Should We Tell Others?
- Does God Heal Today?
- What about the Church?
- How Can I Make the Most of the Rest of My Life? (Gumbel, [Alpha Course Manual](#) 3)

[Course Manual](#) 3)

Alpha began in 1976 as a home group led by Charles Marnham, a minister at Holy Trinity Brompton Anglican Church in England. This small group targeted unchurched people and sought to share the basics of the Christian faith. The group would meet for a meal, a talk, and discussion. In the early 1990s, after two changes in pastoral leadership of Alpha, Nicky Gumbel

became the minister in charge of the Alpha Course. Gumbel made some changes in the course, which resulted in rapid growth numerically and dramatic life change among the participants (15-17).

Since its inception, Alpha has grown from a small home group in a single church to a movement with Alpha Courses all over the world. In 1991 about five hundred people participated in Alpha, and by 1997 over 500,000 had taken part (Alpha Basics). More than one million people have attended Alpha in the United States and Canada alone. In the United States more than thirty thousand persons indicated “personal life-change through Alpha” in 2004 (“Church Transformation” 1). Recent numbers put the total worldwide participation in Alpha at over 6.7 million people with 30,174 courses running in 153 different countries (“Did You Know?” 9).

Alpha is a program for outreach and is based on six principles of evangelism. The first principle of Alpha is that the most effective way to evangelize is through the local church. By going through the local church, persons are introduced to the church and are more likely to become a part of that community.

The second Alpha principle recognizes that evangelism is a process. An understanding of the Christian faith can best be developed over time and through a process.

The third principle of Alpha states that evangelism involves the entire person. An effort is made to appeal to a person’s heart, mind, and will throughout the course.

The fourth Alpha principle is that evangelism in the New Testament includes word, works, and wonders. Word is the preaching of the gospel of

Jesus Christ. Works are the acts of love and service offered in the name of Christ. Wonders are the accompanying signs of the Holy Spirit's power.

The fifth principle of Alpha is that evangelism, when done in the power of the Holy Spirit, is dynamic and effective. Remarkable things happen in people's lives when the Holy Spirit works through evangelism.

The sixth and final principle of Alpha is that in order to do effective evangelism, a person must be filled with the Holy Spirit. This filling of the Holy Spirit continues as persons live out their faith (Gumbel, How to Run 23-39).

Commenting on Alpha's commitment to evangelism and the renewal that sometimes accompanies the introduction of Alpha in a congregation, Nicky Gumbel states, "Renewal is a by-product of evangelism. The focus must remain on evangelism" (Personal interview).

Alpha continues to be a "practical introduction to the Christian faith" (Gumbel, How to Run 43). In addition, the course offers sincere hospitality, a learning environment with an element of humor, good food, community in small groups, and a safe place for people to ask questions. The Alpha format begins with a meal, which is followed by times for welcome, worship, a talk delivered live or on video, coffee with dessert, and small group discussion (43-44).

Purpose

Churches need help in reaching the unchurched in their communities. Churches also need resources to help persons already in their congregations mature in their faith. Many people need to move from a faith based on intellectual assent to a faith that also encompasses the heart. Other people need to move from a faith that appears dead to one that is expressed in everyday living. E. Stanley Jones states, "A conversion that isn't growing is on

its way out. It degenerates into dead forms and phrases out of which the content has dropped. Into that emptiness, evil spirits come and take over. Conversion is perverted” (Conversion 245). Methods need to be discovered that can empower the church to help people become transformed by Christ as well as continue the transformation process. George Gallup, Jr. addresses these concerns:

Alpha can, I believe, play a key role in bringing about a transforming moment in American Christianity. It can move the unchurched and nominal Christians to a deeper love of God through Jesus Christ by the graceful invitation, the transcendent power of growing together in small groups, and hearing the gospel presented in clear and compelling terms. (“Alpha” 18)

Alpha appears to be an effective tool in helping persons experience faith transformation. In terms of relational, small group evangelism, Eddie Gibbs observes, “Without a doubt the most significant application of this dynamic in operation is the Alpha Course” (198). Many churches may find Alpha an effective way to reach their communities for Christ.

The purpose of the study was to determine the effectiveness of Alpha in helping to bring people to a faith commitment in Jesus Christ and the effectiveness of Alpha in helping people experience faith transformation. Rather than looking at the broad range of issues within faith transformation, this study focused on two aspects of transformation: a person’s love of God and a person’s love of neighbor.

Research Questions

Four research questions emerged which guided this project.

Research Question #1

Do persons make a faith commitment to Jesus Christ as a result of participating in the Alpha Course?

Research Question #2

Do persons who participate in the Alpha Course exhibit faith transformation as evidenced by a significant increase in their love of God?

Research Question #3

Do persons who participate in the Alpha Course exhibit faith transformation as evidenced by a significant increase in their love of neighbor?

Research Question #4

Do the observed results vary based on the context of the Alpha Course?

Definition of Terms

Faith transformation is a positive change in the character or condition of a person's love of God and love of neighbor.

The Alpha Course is a ten-week introduction to Christianity designed for evangelism.

Faith commitment is a first-time or recommitment of one's faith in Jesus Christ.

Context of the Study

This study was conducted in two United Methodist churches offering the Alpha Course: the researcher's church, NorthPoint United Methodist Church in Shreveport, Louisiana, and the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Kansas City, Kansas.

NorthPoint United Methodist Church is located in the northwestern part of Louisiana near the city of Shreveport. The church is located near the semi-rural bedroom community of Blanchard, Louisiana. The population around NorthPoint is comprised primarily of Middle American families (44 percent). Anglos account for 44 percent of the population and African-Americans

represent 52 percent. Married couples comprise 52 percent of the population, while 40 percent are single mothers. College graduates represent only 9 percent of the population ([My Community](#)).

NorthPoint UMC is a new church that emerged as a result of a restart of an existing congregation, Blanchard United Methodist Church, in the spring of 2004. The church has ninety-eight members and averages over ninety people in worship. NorthPoint (NP) currently meets in Donnie Bickham Middle School and plans to build on seventeen acres located on Louisiana Highway 1. The Alpha Course surveyed in this study was NorthPoint's first course and is part of the congregation's strategy in reaching the community for Christ.

The United Methodist Church of the Resurrection is located near the suburban Overland Park section of Kansas City along the State Line corridor south of I-435. The population around the Church of the Resurrection is comprised primarily of affluent families (97 percent). Anglos account for 88 percent of the population and African-Americans represent only 4 percent. Married couples comprise 88 percent of the population, while only 10 percent are single mothers. College graduates represent 45 percent of the population ([My Community](#)).

The Church of the Resurrection was planted in June 1990 under the leadership of pastor Adam Hamilton. With a focus on evangelism, the church has grown rapidly and now has a membership of more than thirteen thousand adults and children with a worship attendance well over ten thousand. The Church of the Resurrection (COR) is known as one of the country's fastest growing congregations ([Our Story](#)). COR has been running Alpha since April 2000 with approximately four thousand people attending since the first course.

COR offers three morning and three evening courses each year (Guarini).

The Alpha Course is a ten-week introduction to the Christian faith and designed to be offered two to three times a year. Volunteer participants from each church's Alpha Course were surveyed with an identical instrument before and after the course.

Methodology

This project was a panel study comprised of one quantitative instrument. According to William Wiersma, "A panel study is a longitudinal study in which the same sample is measured two or more times. The sample can represent either a specific or general population" (162).

Participants were given a survey based upon an instrument developed by the George H. Gallup International Institute. This survey asked participants to respond to fifteen statements concerning their love of God and fifteen statements concerning their love of neighbor. In addition to the survey statements, participants were asked questions concerning demographic and background factors including age, educational level, income, and local church involvement. One question asked participants to indicate if they had ever made a faith commitment to Jesus Christ. A similar instrument was administered as a posttest to evaluate what changes occurred in each person's love of God and love of neighbor.

Sample

For this study, one Alpha Course was chosen from each of the two participating churches: NorthPoint and the Church of the Resurrection. The sample for this study totaled 123 individuals from these two Alpha Courses. One hundred persons attended the Alpha Course at the Church of the

Comment [SBY1]: Questions including:
Before: Background? Demographics? (gender, age, etc.) Who is Jesus to them?
After: Who is Jesus to them? What impact has Alpha had on their life? Did you attend the retreat?

Resurrection. The Alpha Course at NorthPoint was the first for the church and was attended by twenty-three persons.

Variables

The independent variable of this research was the Alpha Course, a ten-week introductory course to the Christian faith. The Alpha Course begins weekly sessions with a meal and consists of fifteen talks on the basics of Christianity using live or video presentations followed by facilitated small group discussion. A retreat emphasizing the person of the Holy Spirit is held approximately halfway through the course.

The first dependent variable of this study was the faith commitment made by the Alpha participant. The second dependent variable of this study was the faith transformation experienced by the participants evidenced by changes in their love of God and love of neighbor. Potential intervening variables for the participants included education, level of Christian experience, church background, cultural background, and socioeconomic factors.

Instrumentation

The instrument used in this study was a modification of a survey used by the Gallup Institute to probe a person's love of God and love of neighbor. The survey consisted of fifteen statements that were intended to explore a person's love of God and fifteen that explored their love of neighbor. The identical thirty statements were given in a pretest and posttest and participants were asked to respond to each item on a six-point Likert scale. The pretest included a section of demographic questions at the end of the instrument. The posttest included a section of questions probing the individual's faith commitment and experience of Alpha.

Data Collection

A pretest survey was administered at the first meeting of the Alpha Course at each of the two churches. A posttest survey was administered at the last meeting of the ten-week course. Each Alpha Course leader conducted the administration of the surveys. Surveys were collected and coded according to the participants' month and day of birth. Surveys were then matched according to the birth date given on the pretest and posttest. The pretest and posttest surveys that could not be matched were grouped separately for analysis.

Limitations and Generalizability

One likely limitation is the level of leadership needed to direct the course successfully over a significant period of time. A church that has been running the Alpha Course for a longer time period may have a more effective course.

The Alpha Course may also be limited by the lack of participation from outside the local church. A lack of unchurched and pre-Christian participants may suppress the overall change of the sample.

An additional limitation of the study may result from persons dropping out of the course. The dropout rate may reduce the number of matched pretests and posttests.

These limitations and differences between Alpha Courses may constrict the extent to which the findings of this study may be generalized.

Overview

Chapter 2 of this dissertation presents a review of selected literature relevant to this study. The disciplines of theology and conversion examine how persons experience conversion. The first part of Chapter 2 explores the biblical and historical theology implicit in conversion. The second part of Chapter 2

reviews the psychology of conversion. The third part of Chapter 2 investigates conversions related to the Alpha Course.

The research design is presented in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 reports the research findings. Chapter 5 discusses suggestions for further study.

CHAPTER 2

A SELECTIVE REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The Alpha Course is designed for outreach through the local church and views evangelism as a process of transformation in the heart and mind of an individual. Alpha recognizes that this inner transformation should also lead to an outward change in behavior and attitude. The view of evangelism as a process and the view of transformation as a holistic change, places Alpha in close relationship to a Wesleyan understanding of conversion. As a result of this perspective, I have focused, though not exclusively, on authors in the Wesleyan tradition.

Faith Transformation and Conversion

The change that the Christian community refers to as conversion is a transforming process that affects a person's entire being. M. G. Easton's definition of conversion states, "[I]n a more special sense men are converted when, by the influence of divine grace in their souls, their whole life is changed, old things pass away, and all things become new." Paul writes, "What this means is that those who become Christians become new persons. They are not the same anymore, for the old life is gone. A new life has begun" (2 Corinthians 5:17). This new life is a process of transformation that continues even after a faith commitment to Christ has been made. It is the process that enables a person to become obedient to the Great Commandment: "And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.' The second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Mark 12:30-31). Jones describes the transformation that occurs in the process of conversion:

We take air into our lungs and transform the blood from impure to pure and send it on its healing, life-sustaining way; we take in food and transform it into blood and tissue and cell; we transform mere sense impressions upon the retina into sight; we take wild sounds and tame them to time and tune and make them into music; we take two people, tie them together with bonds of love and make them into a family; we take the self-centered soul and get him to surrender all this to Christ and he is transformed, not only into a living soul, but into a life giving spirit. (How to Be 364)

Organic life involves the process of transforming raw material into life giving energy. Faith transformation is a process that converts the rebellious, self-centered human being, into a new life identified by a deep love of God and neighbor.

Wesley acknowledges that human beings place their faith in many things. He describes a range of faith from a materialist faith to the faith of Protestant scholasticism. Wesley believes many types of faith fall short of saving faith and exhorted people to grow from “faith to faith” (Works of John Wesley 7: 225-28). This transformation is evidenced by the accounts of conversion in the New Testament.

Conversion in the New Testament

Christian conversion is a widely discussed issue with multiple points of view. Richard Peace writes in his research on New Testament conversions, “The church has not always been clear about conversion. In fact, a wide difference of opinion exists as to what constitutes conversion” (1). The perspective of the New Testament is critical in developing a framework for understanding, and the book of Acts is particularly helpful through its accounts of conversion.

The book of Acts reports many conversions to Christianity during the early days of the church. Many of these conversions involved devout Jews who put their faith in Jesus Christ as the good news was revealed to them. Some

Gentile Godfearers also responded with faith when the message of Christ was communicated to them. Still other Gentiles worshipped other gods until they turned from their idol worship to embrace faith in Jesus Christ. Four conversions figure most prominently in the book of Acts: the conversion of the crowd at Pentecost; the conversion of the Ethiopian; the conversion of Paul; and, the conversion of the Roman soldier Cornelius. Acts reports several of these accounts of transformation brought about by the power of the Holy Spirit. William H. Willimon states, “Whatever the Gospel is about, it is about change of mind and life” (101).

Conversion of the Pentecost Crowd

Acts 2:14-41 records the preaching of Peter and the conversion of many in the crowd. On the day of Pentecost, many Jews were gathered from throughout the known world. These Jews and proselytes were likely God-fearing, law-abiding people who had traveled to Jerusalem because of their religious convictions. Everyone in the crowd was somewhat perplexed by the manifestations they witnessed as the Holy Spirit was poured out on the gathered disciples. The gathered crowd questioned the meaning of the event; some accused the disciples of being intoxicated; others were amazed to hear the disciples speak in their own languages (Bruce 64).

Peter, by the power of the Holy Spirit, then engaged the confused crowd with the first Christian sermon. Peter appealed to Scripture and Israel’s history as evidence that the news he was proclaiming was validated and true (Fernando 108-09). This sermon was not only an effective explanation of the Pentecost event, but the sermon was also a convicting word to the crowd and a call for repentance (Bruce 75). Through Peter’s inspired words, he appealed to both the

hearts and minds of the people in the crowd.

Peter's word to the crowd was effective, not because he possessed great poise or ability, but because he was empowered by the Spirit (Willimon 36). Peter's words were convicting and the crowd's response was one of urgent desperation. The people asked the disciples what they should do, and Peter told them to be baptized in the name of Jesus. He also said those baptized would receive the promised gift of the Holy Spirit. About three thousand people in the crowd who responded to Peter's call were added to the ranks of the fledgling church.

Among those first Pentecost believers were persons who had followed God, but who had been unaware of their need for Jesus Christ. These believers likely had observed all of the Jewish traditions including the offering of sacrifices and the observance of religious festivals and feasts. The Pentecost believers probably had done their best to obey the Law of Moses and to live a righteous life. Yet, these Jews and proselytes had missed the most important news in the history of the world. A comparison can be drawn between these new believers and many people found in churches today. Regular church attendees may typically be God fearers; nevertheless, they may lack the saving grace offered through Jesus Christ.

Conversion of the Ethiopian

Acts 8:26-40 reports the conversion of a high-ranking Ethiopian official through the ministry of Phillip. The Holy Spirit led Phillip to a desert road where he encountered the traveler. Luke suggests the he was a Godfearer or a proselyte (Fernando 283). Willimon describes him as "an earnest inquirer who reaches out and is graciously included into the actions of God" (72). He had

been reading from the book of Isaiah as he traveled. Speaking to Phillip, the man expressed frustration that he had no one to instruct him concerning the Scriptures. Phillip seized the opportunity given to him by the Spirit, and he began to tell this man the good news about Jesus Christ. The Ethiopian's response was swift and immediate. He requested that Phillip baptize him in some nearby water.

This Ethiopian seeker is also similar to people in today's churches and communities. He believed in God and was ready to hear the good news. The only thing he lacked was someone to bring the message to him. Through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, Phillip was appointed to share the message with him; by the power of the Spirit, the message was received.

Conversion of Paul

Acts 9:1-31 records the dramatic transformation of the chief persecutor of the Christians (Saul) into the great missionary of the early Church (Paul). Of the conversions in Acts, Paul's conversion is probably the most dramatic. In fact, this conversion is so dramatic George Lyttelton observes, "The conversion and apostleship of St. Paul alone, duly considered, was of itself a demonstration sufficient to prove Christianity to be a divine revelation" (qtd. in Bruce 196). Saul was both a devout Jew and an educated member of the Pharisees. Saul is presented as "a violent, active, resourceful persecutor of the young [Christian] community" (Willimon 74).

The account of Saul's conversion begins with his expanding pursuit of Christians from Jerusalem to Damascus. As he was traveling with his companions on the road, a bright light from heaven shone upon him. A voice asked Saul why he was persecuting him. Saul responded by asking who was

speaking to him; the voice identifies himself as Jesus. Saul was struck blind and rendered completely helpless. His companions were surprised but they were unaffected by the voice. Willimon applies this dramatic event concerning Saul to conversion:

Conversion, it would seem, while the result of the objective act of God in a person's life is also intensely personal, often confusing family, friends, and bystanders, who find it difficult to comprehend what has happened to the recipient of conversion.
(76)

This direct encounter with Jesus literally stopped Paul in his tracks and yet remained a complete mystery to his companions. Saul was led by his companions to Damascus where he remained blind and helpless until Ananias was led by the Spirit to lay hands on him. Saul was healed and he received the Holy Spirit. The chief enemy of the Christians was transformed into a brother.

Three conclusions may be drawn from this dramatic conversion. First, Paul's story is not an account of a man who experienced some inner struggle that led to conversion; rather, it is a report of someone who was affected by external forces. Paul was faced with overwhelming evidence that he had been following and even blinded by the wrong convictions (Fernando 297). Second, this kind of radical conversion is not something churches or individual Christians can produce. Conversion is something that only Christ can accomplish. Third, the type of conversion experienced by Paul involves a transition from self-dependence to childlike dependence upon God (Willimon 79).

Paul was a devout follower of God with misdirected convictions. Paul's convictions were transformed by the Holy Spirit into a powerful passion to reach the Gentiles with the good news of Jesus Christ. While such a dramatic

conversion may not be the norm in today's churches, Paul's conversion demonstrates how powerfully God can transform faith; no indication is given that Luke intended Paul's conversion to be normative for every Christian (Willimon 80).

Although Paul's conversion experience may not be intended as normative, Peace identifies three *movements* and three *spheres* within Paul's conversion that may be seen elsewhere:

In other words, Paul's conversion is marked by three movements within three spheres. There are insight, turning, and transformation that affect who he is, how he relates to Jesus, and what he does within his culture. Furthermore, these movements within these spheres are all in the context of God. Christian conversion is not a generalized movement of transformation within the context of one's relationships to other people and to the world around one. It involves new insight into God, new turning toward God, and a new life lived in response to God. It involves seeing oneself in the light of God's truth, embracing a new relationship to God, and living this out within the community of God's people as a servant and witness to all people. (101)

Peace contends that while experience of conversion is varied, the same *movements* and *spheres* that appear in Paul's conversion also show themselves in other conversion accounts.

Conversion of Cornelius

Acts 10:1-11:18 reports the conversion of the Roman centurion, Cornelius, through the ministry of Peter. Cornelius was a God-fearing man who prayed to God and was generous to those in need. Godfearers were those who attended the synagogue and followed Jewish customs and laws but who had not become a part of the community through circumcision (Fernando 318). Gentiles were attracted by the simple monotheistic Jewish religion and the ethical standards of the Jewish faith. Cornelius seems to have had every qualification to be a proselyte except for circumcision (Bruce 216).

One afternoon Cornelius was confronted with a vision of an angel coming toward him. The angel told him that God had noticed his actions of prayer and piety and that he was to send messengers to Simon Peter to request that Peter come to his home.

The next day, Peter also had a vision of a sheet lowered from the sky with all kinds of animals. Peter was then instructed to get up and eat; he refused. The voice in the vision stated, "If God says something is acceptable, don't say it isn't" (Acts 10:15). Peter realized this vision revealed that Jewish ceremonial food barriers were being abolished. He also recognized the wider implication of including Gentiles in the Christian community (Bruce 222).

When Cornelius' messengers arrived, Peter went with them to see the centurion. Luke restates the story of the angel's visit to Cornelius to press the point that God was orchestrating the situation. Peter went with the messengers, but he had no idea where he is going or why (Willimon 96).

Peter arrived at Cornelius' home to a gathering of Cornelius' family and friends. Peter confessed that his presence at Cornelius' house was a violation of Jewish law. Willimon notes that dual conversion was occurring. Cornelius and Peter both needed to be transformed if the mission of the church was to go forward (96).

Peter then shared the good news of Jesus Christ with the receptive gathering. Peter declared that God does not show partiality and that God "accepts those who fear him and do what is right" (Acts 10:34). He continued to tell the story of Jesus Christ, and as he was speaking the Holy Spirit fell on everyone who heard the message. That the crowd began speaking in tongues and praising God attested to their reception of the Holy Spirit.

Willimon observes, “Cornelius is surprisingly passive in this story, as if he is someone who is being swept along, carried by events and reacting to actions quite beyond his power to initiate or control” (100). Cornelius’ conversion was facilitated by the power of God, not by human effort or intent. The conversion of Cornelius is another example of a devout follower of God who was transformed by the good news of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Joel Green gives a helpful analysis of Luke’s contribution to the understanding of conversion:

Luke’s contribution to our understanding of the concept and experience of conversion is to ground conversion in the grand narrative of God’s ancient and ongoing purpose. Additionally, Luke’s perspective refuses any facile distinctions between conversion as act and process, between cognitive and moral change, between movement from one religion to another and deepening commitment within one’s religion, and between personal and community formation. To each of these possible emphases, Luke’s narrative issues a resounding yes. This is because conversion for Luke is a radical allegiance to the Lord, and concomitant with this relationship, a fundamental orientation toward the vision of God and God’s work expressed through the life, death, exaltation, and ongoing presence of the Lord Jesus. (118)

Luke’s holistic understanding of conversion is evident in his gospel account and in the book of Acts.

The conversion accounts in the book of Acts are too varied and rich to be distilled into a pattern or scheme of conversion. Acts’ conversion narratives “warn the church against making any one pattern or scheme the standard steps for conversion” (Willimon 102). Conversion is more like a journey or pilgrimage than a sequence of steps or momentary event (103).

Nevertheless, within this journey or pilgrimage, characteristics span the chasm of varied conversion experiences. Peace identifies “core characteristics”

in the conversion of Paul and the twelve disciples:

There is insight (into self and into Jesus); there is the turning itself (from sin/hardness-of-heart to Jesus by repentance and faith); and there is transformation (forgiveness, discipleship, new life). In both accounts—the account of Paul and the account of the Twelve—we are in the same world of conversion. (281)

These conversion narratives are about beginnings. The conversion of the Pentecost crowd marked the beginning of the church. The conversion of the Ethiopian official marked a beginning of a new life and a new chapter in Phillip's ministry. The conversion of Paul similarly marked the beginning of a new life and the beginning of a new chapter in the life of the church. The story of the conversion of Cornelius' household was the beginning of new lives and an expansion of the church to the Gentiles.

Finally, these conversion stories are about the power of God at work in the lives of people. These conversions were not the result of the skillful messages presented or carefully planned strategies executed. Rather, all of these accounts show that God is the chief actor through the power of the Holy Spirit (Willimon 103).

John Wesley and Conversion

Wesley refers to his theological understanding of conversion as the "way of salvation." He believes that all persons need to be saved, all persons can be saved, all persons can know they are saved, and all persons can be saved to the uttermost (Matthaei 48).

Wesley's view of conversion understands the human condition as fallen and in need of salvation. This state of bondage or "natural man" is illuminated by the analogy of a child playing near a cliff. The child is unaware of the danger and this ignorance makes the situation even more dangerous. Likewise, fallen

people stand on the edge of the abyss of final judgment but are unaware of the danger. Wesley thinks that humanity's ignorance of their fallen condition is not limited by education or intelligence; in fact, he observes this unawareness often in persons of high educational attainment. Fallen people may include the nominally religious. These persons may attend religious services and they may even participate in Christian activities (Oden, John Wesley's 280-81).

As transformation begins, this ignorance is ended by an encounter with the holiness of God and his justice. As persons are awakened from this state, they become aware of their moral failure, and they can move on to experience salvation. Oden comments, "Consciousness becomes trapped in a whirling entanglement of guilt and fear of punishment. No matter how one strives to improve, one is drawn further into its vortex" (John Wesley's 282). In his sermon, "The Spirit of Bondage and Adoption," Wesley describes the "legal man":

By some awful providence, or by his word applied with the demonstration of his Spirit, God touches the heart of him that lay asleep in darkness and in the shadow of death. He is terribly shaken out of his sleep, and wakes into a consciousness of his danger. Perhaps in a moment, perhaps by degrees, the eyes of his understanding are opened, and now first (the veil being in part removed) discern the real state he is in. Horrid light breaks in upon his soul; such light, as may he conceived to gleam from the bottomless pit, from the lowest deep, from a lake of fire burning with brimstone. He at last sees the loving, the merciful God is also "a consuming fire." (Works of John Wesley 5: 173)

Paul describes guilt as "a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear" (Rom. 8:15, NIV). Only after an encounter with the reality of sin and guilt is a person prepared to hear God's good news in Jesus Christ (Oden, John Wesley's 282-83).

The Spirit does not leave a person in this state of guilt, but he draws

them toward justifying grace. Repentance enables the person to enter a new reality of life under grace. Oden remarks, “God’s justifying action reaches into the middle of this human condition” (John Wesley’s 284). He thus takes upon himself the responsibility for humans’ sin, and they share in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Wesley describes this radical change:

Here end both the guilt and power of sin. He can now say, “I am crucified with Christ: Nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: And the life which I now live in the flesh,” (even in this mortal body,) “I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” Here end remorse, and sorrow of heart, and the anguish of a wounded spirit. (Works of John Wesley 5: 178)

Because of this change, persons know they are saved. The result of this transformation is what Wesley called the “evangelical state” (5: 181). The “evangelical state” is a life under grace and of peace free from condemnation. New believers have been adopted into God’s family; they can cry “Abba, Father!” (Rom. 8:15). Wesley describes this transformation as the work of the Holy Spirit:

It is this spirit which continually “worketh in them, both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” It is he that sheds the love of God abroad in their hearts, and the love of all mankind; thereby purifying their hearts from the love of the worlds from the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. (5: 179)

Wesley sees the process of transformation from natural to legal to evangelical as the work of the Holy Spirit in a person’s life. Nevertheless, Wesley does not limit conversion by the power of the Spirit to those outside the church. In fact, he understands a person may have the outer trappings of Christianity and not be a Christian.

The “Almost Christian”

Wesley preached a sermon entitled, “The Almost Christian,” based on the

question of King Agrippa to Paul, in Acts 26:28, “Do you think you can make me a Christian so quickly?” (Acts 26:28, NLT). Wesley contrasts the “almost Christian” with the “altogether Christian” (Works of John Wesley 5: 81).

The “almost Christians” appear to be Christians by their actions and religious observances, but they lack the power of pardon and holiness within. These persons are marked by what Wesley calls “heathen honesty” (Works of John Wesley 5: 81). Persons with “heathen honesty” do not steal, do not cheat, do not engage in extortion and seek to owe nothing to anyone (5: 81). Secondly, almost Christians appear godly because they observe the Sabbath, avoid adultery and fornication, and abstain from gossip and backbiting. Almost Christians show kindness to their neighbor and are generous to those in need. Almost Christians also attend worship regularly and behave “with seriousness and attention in every part of that solemn service” (5: 84). In addition, these persons consistently pray privately and with their family. Finally, almost Christians are marked by sincerity, “a real design to serve God, [and] a hearty desire to do his will” (5: 78).

According to Wesley, altogether Christians are marked by a love of God. He states, “Such a love as this, as engrosses the whole heart, as takes up all the affections, as fills the entire capacity of the soul, and employs the utmost extent of all its faculties” (Works of John Wesley 5: 85-86). Secondly, altogether Christians love their neighbors. Wesley defines *neighbor* as “[e]very man in the world; every child of [H]is who is the Father of the spirits of all flesh” (5: 86). Finally, altogether Christians are identified by their faith. Wesley quotes his own Church of England when he defines faith:

Not only to believe that holy Scripture and the articles of faith are true, but also to have a sure trust and confidence to be saved from

everlasting damnation by Christ. It is a sure trust and confidence which a man hath in God, that, by the merits of Christ, his sins are forgiven, and he reconciled to the favor of God; whereof doth follow a loving heart, to obey his commandments. (5: 87)

Wesley sees himself as a prime example of an “almost Christian” until his Aldersgate experience in 1738. Wesley desperately sought to live a holy and devout life, even going as far as volunteering for an overseas mission to the Americas. Nevertheless, Wesley admits that though he appeared to be a Christian, his heart did not belong to God. Near the end of his return trip to England, he describes his spiritual struggle:

I left my native country, in order to teach the Georgian Indians the nature of Christianity: But what have I learned myself in the mean time? Why, (what I the least of all suspected,) that I who went to America to convert others, was never myself converted to God. (1: 95)

Wesley experienced a change on 24 May 1738, when he attended a meeting on Aldersgate Street. During the meeting as Luther’s preface to Romans was being read, Wesley had this experience:

I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation: And an assurance was given me, that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death. (1: 124)

Later, Wesley would write to his brother Charles that he had not been Christian until his experience on Aldersgate Street (Oden, John Wesley’s 286).

Wesley, like many who experienced conversion in Acts, was a person who was striving after God, but he did not have a saving faith. Wesley would later describe this transformation as moving from the “faith of a servant” to the “faith of a son” (Works of John Wesley 7: 266).

Faith to Faith

Wesley presents several faith types or stages that range from

rudimentary faith to saving faith in his sermon “On Faith.” The first type is the faith of scientific belief or materialists. Materialists “believe that there is nothing but matter in the universe” (Works of John Wesley 7: 225). This faith may allow the possibility that God exists but equates God with the visible material universe (Oden, John Wesley’s 290).

A second type of faith is rationalistic faith or deism. Deists would believe that God exists, but they would deny biblical revelation (John Wesley’s 290). “Most of these [deists] believe the being and attributes of God, they believe that God made and governs the world; and that the soul does not die with the body, but will remain for ever in a state of happiness or misery” (Wesley, Works of John Wesley 7: 225-26).

The third type of faith that Wesley identifies is primitive or “heathen” faith (Oden, John Wesley’s 290-91). Heathens would essentially believe as deists believe: “their not believing the whole truth, is not owing to want of sincerity, but merely to want of light” (Wesley, Works of John Wesley 7: 226).

A fourth type of faith is the theistic and moral faith of Islam. Wesley observes that Islamists sometimes put Christians to shame (Oden, John Wesley’s 291). With regard to Islamic people, Wesley writes, “Although they lived among Heathens, yet [Islamists] were quite of another spirit; being taught of God, by his inward voice, all the essentials of true religion” (Works of John Wesley 7: 226).

Fifth, Wesley distinguishes the Jewish faith from Christian belief by stating that although Jews believe in the Old Testament and that the Messiah will one day appear, “The God of this world still hardens their hearts, and still blinds their eyes, ‘lest at any time the light of the glorious gospel’ should break

in upon them” (Works of John Wesley 7: 226).

A sixth type of faith identified by Wesley is that of John the Baptist, which Wesley describes as “peculiar to himself” (Works of John Wesley 7: 227). Wesley sees this faith as an “anticipatory faith in the Son through the Spirit” (Oden, John Wesley’s 291).

The seventh and final type of faith is Protestant scholasticism. This faith is merely cerebral assent to the truths of Scripture, but head knowledge is still not a saving faith (Oden, John Wesley’s 219-92). Wesley addresses the lack of efficacy of this and the other faiths:

But, in the mean time, let it be carefully observed, (for eternity depends upon it), that neither the faith of a Roman Catholic, nor that of a Protestant, if it contains no more than this, no more than the embracing such and such truths, will avail any more before God, than the faith of a Mahometan or a Heathen; yea, of a Deist or Materialist. For can this “faith save him”? Can it save any man either from sin or from hell? No more than it could save Judas Iscariot: No more than it could save the devil and his angels; all of whom are convinced that every tittle of Holy Scripture is true. (Works of John Wesley 7: 227-28)

For Wesley, these types of faith fall short of a saving faith in Jesus Christ. While leaving room for God to be the judge, Wesley was fervent in exhorting persons to move from any form of faith that fell short of an inward transformation by the power of God and adoption into the family of God.

Servant or Son

An image that Wesley uses to convey this contrast is the “faith of a servant” versus the “faith of a son.” For Wesley, “the faith of a servant” “implies a divine evidence of the invisible and the eternal world ... so far as it can exist without living experience.” The “faith of a servant” is “the spirit of bondage unto fear” (Works of John Wesley 7: 255). Wesley considers the “faith of a servant” as preparatory to receiving adoption by God (Oden, John Wesley’s 292).

The “faith of a son” is exemplified by an inward change of heart that enables believers to love God and love their neighbor. Wesley describes this faith as “the spirit of childlike love” (Works of John Wesley 7: 255). Wesley exhorts people to progress from “faith to faith,” and mature in their relationship with God.

The “faith of a servant” is remarkably similar to the initial faith found in many of the new converts in the book of Acts. People in churches today often express a faith that falls short of a life-transforming love relationship with God. The church needs a method to exhort these persons to mature from “faith to faith.” Wesley developed a response that is much needed today.

Wesley’s Class Meetings

The belief in an “incremental growth of faith toward full maturity” was manifested in Wesley’s system of class meetings (Oden, John Wesley’s 292). These small groups were divided into *societies, classes, and bands*.

Societies were the central group in the Methodist class system. Wesley defines these societies in the “Rules of the United Societies”:

Such a society is no other than a company of men having the form and seeking the power of godliness, united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other work out their own salvation. (Henderson 84)

These groups functioned as instructional bases from which to share the doctrine of Methodism. Societies also served to develop lay ministers who had oversight of the groups. These societies met several times a week for worship and instruction that focused on application of Christian principles to everyday life (88-93).

Class meetings were initially developed to facilitate fund-raising in the

Bristol Society, but meetings soon evolved into intimate groups of ten to twelve people who held each other accountable for spiritual growth. Class leaders became the first level of leadership within the Methodist movement. Considered “sub-pastors,” leaders were responsible for caring for their class and creating a culture of acceptance and commitment. Wesley’s groups were separated according to gender except for class meetings that included both men and women. These classes were diverse and consisted of people from all lifestyles. Deep friendships formed in these groups and the classes often remained together for many years (Henderson 93-101).

Bands were formed from Christians who desired deeper levels of Christian commitment. Wesley intended these groups to exercise “close conversation,” which involved deeply open and honest sharing of behaviors and motives. Wesley developed a set of questions to be asked during these meetings:

- 1) What known sins have you committed since our last meeting?
 - 2) What temptations have you met with?
 - 3) How were you delivered?
 - 4) What have you thought, said or done, of which you doubt whether it be sin or not?
 - 5) Have you nothing you desire to keep secret?
- (Henderson 118-19)

Wesley later developed select societies that were aimed at Christian perfection and penitent bands that were intended to restore persons who had fallen into sin back into the movement (125).

Wesley’s understanding of salvation was an underlying foundation for each of these small groups. Wesley believed that a person grows from “faith to faith;” therefore, he provided different venues in which persons could be nurtured and grown into Christian maturity. In many of today’s churches, people who are living with the faith of servants could be transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit into believers who have the faith of sons and daughters.

In many cases, what seems to be lacking is a system in which people can be encouraged and nurtured so that they may experience faith transformation.

Henry H. Knight, III points out four errors, which attempt to reduce conversion to a single element, to be avoided when analyzing Wesley's perspective on conversion. First, conversion should not be confused with regeneration. For Wesley conversion is much broader and encompasses regeneration, the gift of faith, justification, and the witness of the spirit. Secondly, conversion and justification should not be considered synonymous for Wesley. Third, the human decision to believe should not be equated with conversion in Wesley's thinking. For Wesley conversion focuses on the divine agency, not the human decision. The forth error to be avoided is to equate conversion with some type of experience and accompanying feelings. For Wesley the witness of the Spirit "is more an inner conviction than a feeling" (46).

Knight defines Wesley's view of conversion as "most fundamentally a multifaceted transformation of the human heart, whose immediate goal is to enable persons to know and love God, and ultimately aims toward their perfection in love" (46). Wesley's view shaped his ministry, most notably in his use of Class Meetings to help individuals continue to be transformed and grow in their faith.

Wesley reflects in his theology the biblical witness as well as the witness of human experience that conversion is a process initiated by God consisting of many phases. Although a point of decision exists in which a person embraces saving faith, the process of conversion continues throughout the person's life.

The Psychology of Conversion

Cedric B. Johnson and H. Newton Maloney point out two dimensions in

the process of conversion. The first is the divine side in which the Lord turns people to himself. In the divine side, the person is passive. The second is the human side in which the individual responds to God by turning. In the human side, the person is active. Johnson and Maloney observe two key points that emerge from this perspective. First, the person who responds provides data for psychological investigation. Second, the divine dimension of conversion cannot be predicted (169).

In biblical terms, a person who responds to the gospel is described by repentance and faith. These behaviors are observable from a social science perspective even though the root cause is the power of God. Johnson and Malony state that the human behaviors of thinking, feeling, and deciding are observable. A psychologist can observe the cognitive process that takes place within a person who “has a change of mind toward God, self and sin” (169). Feelings such as grief and conflict can also be observed in a person responding to God. The decision of a person can be observed through the cultural parameters of the decision process that have been established by the person’s cultural context. Although human behavior can be observed and described, the “mysterious why” of the divine element prevents psychologists from explaining conversion (170).

Lewis Rambo refers to conversion as a “complex, multifaceted process involving personal, cultural, social and religious dimensions” (165). Rambo observes that this process takes place over time and that people change for many different reasons. He also observes that contemporary theologians see genuine conversion transpiring over an individual’s lifetime (165). Rambo identifies seven stages in the process of conversion.

First, *context* is the “dynamic force field in which conversion takes place” (Rambo 165). This stage encompasses the person’s network of relationships, education, and institutional structures. These influences create the atmosphere in which a person begins the process of conversion.

Second, a *crisis* causes individuals to confront the reality of their situation and limitations. Because of this crisis, a person recognizes a void that needs to be filled (Rambo 166).

Third, a *quest* begins for the answer to the problems a person faces. “The potential convert, like all other people, is motivated by the desire to experience pleasure and avoid pain, maintain a conceptual system, enhance self-esteem, establish gratifying relationships, and attain a sense of power and transcendence” (Rambo 166-67). These universal needs drive individuals to look at many possible answers, including faith.

The fourth stage is the *encounter* of a person in crisis with an advocate who is seeking to provide the answers to the problem. This encounter may lead to an interaction with the advocate.

Fifth, *interaction* occurs involving a more intense interchange and “more intense level of learning” (Rambo 167). At this point relationships begin to form the foundation for the person’s new way of life (167).

The sixth stage of the conversion process is *commitment*. Commitment is the end of the conversion process and the person “becomes a full member of the new community through rituals of incorporation” (Rambo 169-70).

The seventh and final stage of the conversion process is *consequence[s]*. The effects of the conversion are evident throughout the process. For some people the effect is a radically reoriented and transformed life. Other people

experience a new sense of purpose and meaning. Still, other individuals may experience disappointment when the new orientation does not live up to expectations (Rambo 170).

Alpha Course Conversions

A survey conducted by the Presbyterian Church, USA, reported that 50 percent of the churches participating had the specific goal of helping people make a faith commitment to Christ (Alpha Course Survey 3). In addition, the survey found that in 69 percent of those churches, participants made a personal commitment to Christ (4). The history of Alpha is full of stories of lives changed and transformed by the power of God. These transformations range from recommitments of faith to the conversion of atheists and agnostics. Although the stories differ, Alpha seems to communicate the gospel in a way that many persons readily respond to the good news of Jesus Christ. Many of these stories have been compiled in a series of books called The God Who Changes Lives (Elsdon-Dew). The following stories are from the American edition of this series and demonstrate the transformation associated with Alpha.

Dan Courtright

Dan Courtright was part of the biker culture and traveled around the United States engaging in a wild and reckless lifestyle (Elsdon-Dew 25). In May 2000 after years of drinking, Dan came to the conclusion that he needed help. He cried out to God to help him stop drinking and joined a twelve-step program at the Salvation Army in Tulsa, Oklahoma (30-31).

Dan met a friend in rehab who invited him to Alpha at his church, First United Methodist Church, Tulsa. Even though he was nervous, Dan attended

the meeting and soon began to feel that he was in the right place. Dan states that during Alpha, “I realized that He [Jesus] had died on the cross for our sins. He died because of the things I’d done before he even knew me” (Elsdon-Dew 33). Dan asked Jesus into his life and asked God to direct his life (Elsdon-Dew 33).

Dan describes the change in his life toward others and toward God:

Before, I didn’t care who I ran over. If people got in my way, that was too bad for them. But now I try to look ahead and think, OK, what does God want me to do? How do I need to do things? I’m trying to do things according to His will. I’m just looking at things from a different perspective than I used to. Jesus says to love one another, and I’m trying to see how that fits together with what I do. Now, almost every morning, when I go and do my thing in the bathroom, I’ll look in the mirror, and I’ll ask Jesus to come walk with me. I say, “Just take a walk with me, Bud.” (Elsdon-Dew 33)

Dan describes himself as a changed person who is trying to learn more about Jesus and become a better person. He states, “[I]n becoming a better person, maybe I can help other people to become better people also” (Elsdon-Dew 34).

Frank Costa

Frank Costa was born in New York City and raised in the Roman Catholic Church. Although his mother took him and his brother to church when he was a young boy, by the time Frank reached eighth grade, he quit attending (Elsdon-Dew 73).

Following college, Frank pursued his dream of becoming a New York firefighter and waited for their call-up. In February 1998, Frank was living with a girl and was fighting depression. During this time an old friend reappeared in Frank’s life and invited him to an Alpha Course at his church. Frank cautiously agreed to go to Alpha and at the first meeting prayed a prayer committing himself to Jesus Christ. Frank recalls that before attending Alpha he felt

weighed down by the things in his life, but after saying this prayer, “it was as if several of those weights had been taken right off me” (Elsdon-Dew 74-75).

After the third week of the course, Frank was called into the Fire Academy and was unable to finish the course. In February 1999, Frank was again facing a painful time in his life and asked his friend, Anthony, when another Alpha Course was being offered. This time Frank attended the entire course (Elsdon-Dew 76).

Frank recounts his Alpha experience:

Some people dive into Christianity and it works for them, but with me it happened very, very steadily. Gradually I became more and more committed. My prayer life became much more sincere. I found myself really conversing with God. God had not changed, but my perception of Him had completely changed. (Elsdon-Dew 77)

Frank further comments, “all of a sudden I realized that Jesus—His role in my life—was infinitely important” (77). Jesus Christ became the center and focus of Frank’s life.

Lisa Mausolf

Lisa Mausolf never attended church with her family but started attending an Episcopal church with a neighbor at the age of nine. Nevertheless, by the time Lisa reached her teenage years, she had stopped attending church. Lisa was married when she was twenty-one and had five children. Her husband was a heavy drinker and stayed out every night. Lisa began drinking at home alone (Elsdon-Dew 101-02).

In 1993, Lisa was arrested for driving while intoxicated and again in 1994 and 1996. After her third arrest, Lisa was sentenced to a year in the county jail. By the time she began her sentence in 1997, Lisa had stopped drinking. In March 1998, Lisa was released from jail and went back to her

husband and children. Through the influence of her husband, Lisa began drinking again, resulting in violent physical and verbal behavior. One morning she remembers waking up and crying out to God for help. (Elsdon-Dew 102-03)

Lisa found an alcoholic rehab program and began her recovery. During her time in rehab, Lisa met a Christian named Sally Krepps who invited her to church where they were offering the Alpha Course. In January 1999, Sally began Alpha and after the first night prayed a prayer to give herself to Christ. Sally states, “From then on Christ was in my life—totally” (Elsdon-Dew 103-04).

Sally recalls her experience during the Alpha weekend retreat:

When we went on the course retreat, it was totally awesome. I just cried. For the first time in my life I felt safe. For many years I had felt as if I had a black hole in me and no matter how much booze I poured down my body, it didn’t fill it. And finally, after I don’t know how many years, this hole inside me was filled. And it wasn’t filled with alcohol, it was filled with Christ. (Elsdon-Dew 104)

Sally shares that not only was she filled with Christ, but also her relationships with others were transformed. She describes a deeper love for her family than she has ever had as well as a sense of tranquility in her life (105).

Conclusion

The field of conversion has a wide range of understandings and viewpoints. Nevertheless, many theologians and social scientists agree that conversion is a process, and within this process are several stages, spheres, or landmarks. Although a person may make a faith commitment to Jesus Christ, the process of conversion is not necessarily over, nor does the lack of such a commitment indicate that the process of conversion has not begun. The goal of the Alpha Course is to help facilitate this process of faith transformation, or going from faith to faith, so that persons may come to a saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Alpha views evangelism as a process that culminates in a person's decision to trust his or her life to Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, Alpha also recognizes the continuation of the process of conversion after that decision has been made. People come to Alpha from different stages of life and in different stages, spheres, or turning points in their spiritual lives. Some people who attend Alpha Courses come only searching for answers to the most basic questions in life and are not ready to make faith commitments. Other people come having experienced conversion to the point of a decision but have become sidetracked in living out the implications of that decision. Still others come from various other points along their spiritual journey. An evaluation of Alpha may yield evidence of the course's effectiveness in helping people advance along the journey of conversion.

CHAPTER 3

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Churches need assistance in doing evangelism, both outside and inside the congregation. George Hunter observes that the church in the West faces a world that is very similar to the world of the first century church. The harvest is great and people are seeking spiritual fulfillment. In the midst of this great mission field, the church remains culturally irrelevant and church leaders struggle to recognize the harvest. In the midst of this harvest, the Christian movement has insufficient laborers to share the good news with unchurched people (23).

In addition, many people inside the church are living the “faith of a servant” rather than the “faith of a son” (Wesley, Works of John Wesley 7: 255). These people participate in the religious life of the church, but they lack a faith that encompasses the heart. Methods need to be discovered that can empower the church to help people become transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Alpha Course has gained popularity as an evangelism tool in the United States. The Course shows potential for reaching unchurched people as well as those people inside the church who lack a life-transforming faith. The purpose of the proposed study was to determine the effectiveness of the Alpha Course in helping to produce faith transformation.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study suggests two components: the effectiveness of Alpha in helping to bring people to a faith commitment in Jesus Christ and the effectiveness of Alpha in helping people experience ongoing transformation. The research questions for this study emerge from these components.

Research Question #1

Do persons make a faith commitment to Jesus Christ as a result of participating in the Alpha Course?

This question seeks to discover if persons make a faith commitment to Christ through their participation in Alpha.

Operational questions. Is this a first-time commitment? Is this a re-commitment?

Comment [SBY2]: Chapter 3

Asking individuals to qualify the commitment as a first-time commitment or a recommitment further clarifies the first research question.

Research Question #2

Do persons who participate in the Alpha Course exhibit faith transformation as evidenced by a significant increase in their love of God?

This question focuses on Alpha's effect on a person's love of God.

Research Question #3

Do persons who participate in the Alpha Course exhibit faith transformation as evidenced by a significant increase in their love of neighbor?

This question focuses on Alpha's effect on a person's love of neighbor.

Research Question #4

Do the observed results vary based on the context of the Alpha Course?

This question explores whether the transformation exhibited is related to the context of the Alpha Course.

Population and Sample

This study was conducted in two United Methodist churches offering the Alpha Course. One Alpha Course was chosen from each of the two participating churches. The total population for this study was 123. The sample for this

study totaled 113 individuals for the pretest and sixty-four for the posttest from the two Alpha Courses. As with most programs, Alpha Courses typically experience a number of dropouts. The dropout rate as well as the voluntary nature of the survey, helps to account for the difference in the number of pretests and posttests. The churches chosen for this study were NorthPoint United Methodist Church, Shreveport, Louisiana, and the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection, Kansas City, Kansas.

Instrumentation

This project was a panel study comprised of two quantitative instruments. According to Wiersma, “A panel study is a longitudinal study in which the same sample is measured two or more times. The sample can represent either a specific or general population” (162).

The Alpha Survey

The survey used in this study was based upon an instrument developed as part of a larger study for the Center for Research on Religion and Urban Civil Society at the University of Pennsylvania. The Gallup Organization and the George H. Gallup International Institute conducted the research. In June 2002, the Gallup International Institute used the instrument for a study entitled, “How Are American Christians Living Their Faith.” In the Gallup study, 1,509 adults were contacted by phone and asked to respond to fifteen questions relating to their love of God and fifteen questions related to their love of neighbor. One thousand two hundred seven or 80 percent of the participants considered themselves part of the Christian tradition (Gallup, How Are Americans Christians). The confidence level that the margin of sampling error in this study did not exceed ± 3 percentage points was 95 percent (Telephone

interview).

Gallup addresses the findings of the study:

These findings suggest a connection between a deep love of God and the way people lead their lives. The survey percentages, which translate into millions of Americans, also point to the huge potential social impact that clergy, religious educators, and others can have if they are able to move people toward deeper levels of commitment to God. (How Are Americans Christians)

The staff of Pantego Bible Church in Dallas, Texas, in consultation with Bob Buford of Leadership Network and other national religious leaders, modified and expanded the Gallup survey for use as a spiritual growth assessment within their congregation.

The Gallup survey was considered as a potential instrument for the pretest and posttest. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this study, I chose to modify the original Gallup instrument. Participants were given a modified version of the Gallup survey comprised of fifteen statements to evaluate a person's love of God and fifteen statements to evaluate their love of neighbor. Participants were asked to respond to the statements on a Likert scale from zero to five. Participants were instructed to mark the number that indicated the degree to which the statement applied to them. A response of "zero" indicated that the statement did not apply at all and a response of "five" indicated that the statement applied completely. The six-point scale and fifteen questions combined for a total possible score of seventy-five for both the love of God and love of neighbor. Each participant was asked to write their birth date (month, day) at the top of the survey to code each survey and enable the matching of the pretest and posttest (see Appendix A).

The thirty questions included fifteen probing a person's love of God and fifteen probing their love of neighbor. For example, concerning their love of God,

participants were asked to respond to the statement, “I have an inner peace from God.” Addressing participants’ love of neighbor, persons were asked to respond to the statement, “I know my spiritual gifts and use these in helping others.”

Three statements concerning a person’s love of God were modified from their original form with input from George Gallup. The statement, “I am willing to risk everything that is important in my life for Jesus Christ,” was modified to state, “Those who know me best would say that I love God.” This modification was made out of concern participants would find the statement to be too extreme. The statement, “I believe the Bible has decisive authority over everything I say and do,” was modified to state, “I believe the Bible has decisive authority over the way I live my life.” This modification was made to make the statement more encompassing. The statement, “I believe that nothing I have done or do can earn my salvation,” was modified to state, “I believe that nothing I have done or do can earn God’s forgiveness, approval and love.” This statement was modified to provide clarity to the term salvation.

Comment [SBY3]: Change to read: God’s forgiveness; approval; love; relationship with God?

Three statements concerning a person’s love of neighbor were also modified from their original form. The statement, “God calls me to be involved in the lives of the poor and suffering,” was modified to state, “I am involved in the lives of the poor and suffering.” This statement was modified to make sure it addressed the action of the participant, not just the realization of God’s desire for us to be involved with the poor and suffering. The statement, “My first priority in spending money is to support God’s work,” was modified to state, “A high priority in spending money is to support God’s ministries to others.” This modification was made to make the statement less extreme. The statement, “I

Comment [SBY4]: Changed from “God calls me to be involved in the lives of the poor and suffering.”

am known for not raising my voice,” was modified to state, “I am known for not raising my voice in anger.” This statement was modified to make it clear anger was the factor being addressed.

Comment [SBY5]: Added “in anger”

In addition to the Likert-scale statements, participants were asked questions concerning demographic and background factors including age, educational level, and local church involvement. One question asked participants to indicate the importance of their religious faith (see Appendix B). A similar instrument was administered as a posttest to evaluate what changes occurred in each person’s faith. The posttest instrument did not include the demographic questions but added several researcher-designed questions to probe changes in church attendance and faith commitments and to obtain a participant evaluation of some of the Alpha Course’s components. For example, participants were asked, “Did you make a faith commitment to Jesus Christ during Alpha?” This question was followed by another question to determine if this commitment was a first-time commitment or a recommitment of faith (see Appendix C).

Reliability

Chronbach’s Alpha was used to evaluate the reliability of the survey instrument. Chronbach’s alpha coefficient is often used to compute an estimated internal consistency of attitude scales and requires only one test administration (Wiersma 298). The reliability coefficients of the pretest and posttest were determined to be 0.86 and 0.91, respectively.

Data Collection

Prior to the study, I contacted each of the participating churches and asked for permission to conduct a survey of their respective Alpha Courses.

After permission was given, I contacted the Alpha Course leaders to ask for their support and to explain the process. The Alpha leaders within each congregation agreed to administer the pretest and posttest according to the instructions on the survey. Although I am the pastor of NorthPoint Church, I did not administer the survey. Alpha leaders asked for volunteers from the Alpha Course attendees and instructed the participants on responding to the survey.

Pretest surveys were distributed and collected during the first Alpha Course meeting. The posttest survey was distributed and collected at the end of the ten-week course during the final meeting. After the surveys were returned, the data from each survey was entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Each individual survey was entered in the spreadsheet by rows and coded numerically. Each question of the survey was entered in the spreadsheet by column and coded alphabetically.

Variables

The independent variable of this study was the Alpha Course. The first dependent variable of this study was the faith commitment made by the Alpha participant. The second dependent variable of this study was the faith transformation experienced by the participant. Faith transformation was operationalized as scores indicating participants' love of God and love of neighbor. The scale upon which the variable was measured was quantitative.

I have controlled for potential intervening variables by gathering demographic and church participation data. The demographic data included gender, age, and educational level. The church participation data included the number of Sundays participants attended church per month, the length of time

since their last church attendance, their status as a church member, denominational affiliation, and the status of their commitment to Jesus Christ.

Data Analysis

Scores from the pretest and posttest were analyzed by using the t-test. The t-test, or use of normal distribution, is “used to determine whether two means, proportions, or correlation coefficients differ significantly from each other” (Borg and Gall 428). A t-test (paired two-sample for means) was performed on the pretests and posttests that could be matched according to the birth date of the individual participant. The paired two-sample test is used when pretest and posttest samples can be matched. A t-test (two-sample assuming unequal variances) was performed on the pretest and posttests that could not be matched. The two-sample assuming unequal variances test is used when the pretests and posttests are comprised of distinct samples. Analyzing the data revealed if any significant change occurred in the dependent variable of faith transformation.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

In order to fulfill the Great Commission and to enable persons to be faithful to the Great Commandment, every church needs tools to help individuals experience faith transformation. As demonstrated by many stories of changed lives, the Alpha Course has proven to be an effective tool for facilitating various degrees of faith transformation. The purpose of this research was to objectively evaluate Alpha by examining the degree to which the course precipitates faith transformation as demonstrated by changes in a person's love of God and neighbor.

The pretest and posttest surveys were divided into two categories: matched sample and complete sample. A total of 113 pretests were returned and a total of sixty-four posttests. Of these, ninety-seven pretests and forty-seven posttests were valid. Invalid pretests and posttests consisted of incomplete or improperly completed surveys. A total of thirty-five pretests and posttests were coded and matched according to the birth date (month, day) of the participant. The two categories were analyzed separately and are referred to as "matched sample" and "complete sample" below.

Profile of Subjects

A total of 113 participants in the study completed the pretest and accompanying demographic questions. Of the 113, ninety-eight attended the Church of the Resurrection and fifteen attended NorthPoint. Approximately 35 percent of the subjects were male and 64 percent were female. The average age of those participating was 49 years, and 79 percent had attended church within the last six months. Over 78 percent of the subjects had more than a high

school education, and more than 60 percent had a bachelor's degree or higher.

Table 4.1 shows the profile of participants by age, education, and gender.

Table 4.1. Age, Gender, and Education of Subjects

| | COR | NP | All Subjects |
|-------------------------------|------------|-----------|---------------------|
| Average age | 45.10 | 52.43 | 48.74 |
| Male | 35.71% | 33.33% | 35.40% |
| Female | 64.29% | 60.00% | 63.72% |
| High school or greater | 78.57% | 80.00% | 78.76% |
| Bachelors or greater | 66.33% | 53.33% | 64.60% |

Almost 94 percent of the subjects identified themselves as part of the Christian tradition, while less than 3 percent claimed no religious tradition. Just over 68 percent identified themselves with the Methodist denomination and 8 percent identified themselves as Roman Catholic. Denominations such as Baptist, Presbyterian, and Lutheran comprised just over 7 percent of the subjects. One person identified with the Reformed Latter Day Saints. Slightly more than 83 percent of the participants indicated they were members of a local church while less than 17 percent indicated no church membership. Just over 70 percent of the subjects were members of the church where they attended Alpha, and approximately 29 percent indicated that they were not members of the host church. Table 4.2 shows the status of participants' church membership and denominational affiliation at the time of the study.

Table 4.2. Church Membership and Denominational Affiliation of Subjects

| | COR % | NP % | All Subjects % |
|-------------------------------|--------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| Church member | 81.63 | 93.33 | 83.19 |
| Host church membership | 68.37 | 86.67 | 70.80 |
| Christian tradition | 92.86 | 100.00 | 93.81 |
| Methodist | 67.35 | 73.33 | 68.14 |
| Catholic | 9.18 | 0.00 | 7.96 |
| Denomination-other | 7.14 | 6.67 | 7.08 |

Four research questions guided this study: (1) Do persons make a faith commitment to Jesus Christ as a result of participating in the Alpha Course? (2) Do persons who participate in the Alpha Course exhibit faith transformation as evidenced by a significant increase in their love of God? (3) Do persons who participate in the Alpha Course exhibit faith transformation as evidenced by a significant increase in their love of neighbor? (4) Do the observed results vary based on the context of the Alpha Course?

Faith Commitments

As part of the posttest survey, participants were asked to indicate whether a faith commitment had been made during the Alpha Course. They were further instructed to qualify this commitment as a first-time commitment of faith or a recommitment. A total of sixty-four posttests were analyzed. Of the sixty-four subjects, forty-six, or 71.88 percent, indicated a commitment of faith during Alpha. Of the forty-six, five indicated a first-time commitment, while forty-one indicated a recommitment of faith. Table 4.3 shows the faith commitments made during the studied Alpha Courses.

Thirty-nine of the forty-eight subjects (81.25 percent) from the Church of the Resurrection made commitments of faith. Five of the commitments (10.42

percent) were first time and thirty-four (70.83 percent) were recommitments.

Seven subjects (43.75 percent) from NorthPoint indicated a commitment of faith, and all were described as recommitments.

Table 4.3. Faith Commitments

| | Church of the Resurrection | NorthPoint | All Subjects |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| First-time commitment | 5 | 0 | 5 |
| Recommitment | 34 | 7 | 41 |
| Total | 39 | 7 | 46 |

Those participants who indicated they made a first-time commitment of faith had a greater increase overall in scores related to love of God and love of neighbor. On average, those indicating a first-time commitment of faith had an increase in the love of God mean score of 13.40 versus an average increase of 5.19 for the matched sample. The mean score for love of neighbor increased by 9.60 versus 3.47 for the matched sample. Overall, those indicating a first-time commitment of faith had an increase in the total mean score of 23.00 versus an average increase of 8.66 for the matched sample. Figure 4.1 shows the comparison between those participants who indicated a first-time commitment of faith and the matched sample.

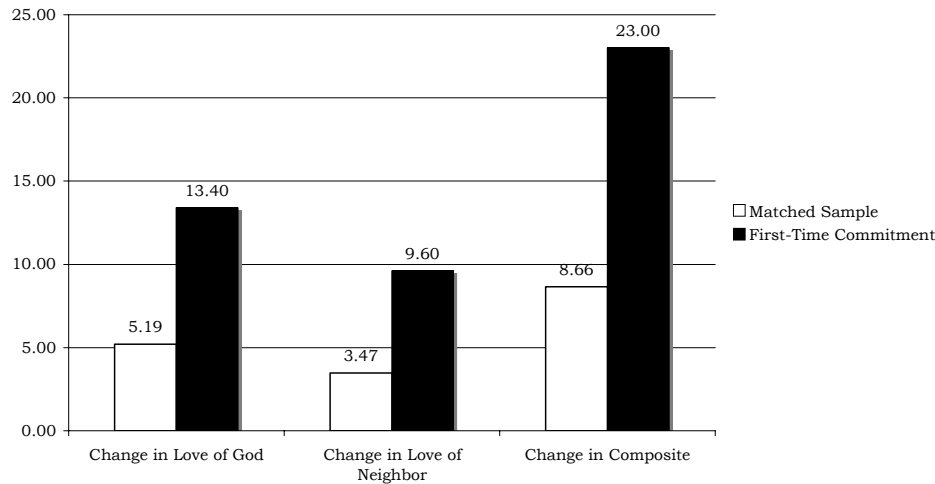


Figure 4.1. First-time Commitment Scores.

Change in Love of God

The first fifteen statements of the survey were designed to explore a person's love of God. Participants responded to statements such as "I believe that God is actively involved in my life." The changes in love of God were analyzed as a matched sample and a complete sample.

Matched Sample Descriptive Statistics

The matched sample was initially analyzed by comparing the mean and standard deviation for scores addressing the love of God.

The mean love of God score for the matched sample from COR increased by 5.13, while the NP score increased by 5.37. The overall mean score also increased by 5.18. The standard deviation remained within a margin of 0.20 for each score. Table 4.4 shows the descriptive statistics from the matched sample associated with the love of God score.

Table 4.4. Matched Sample Descriptive Statistics for Love of God

| | COR Pretest | COR Posttest | NP Pretest | NP Posttest | All Pretest | All Posttest |
|-------------|------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| n | 27.00 | 27.00 | 8.00 | 8.00 | 35.00 | 35.00 |
| Mean | 51.24 | 56.37 | 53.63 | 59.00 | 51.79 | 56.97 |
| SD | 9.44 | 9.25 | 6.61 | 6.48 | 8.84 | 8.68 |

Matched Sample Change

Thirty-five surveys were matched according to the birth dates of the participants. The mean score for love of God increased from 51.79 to 56.97. The one-tailed t-test (paired two sample for means) indicated that the difference of 5.18 between the means was significant ($p = 0.00007$) at the 0.05 level with 34 degrees of freedom.

Table 4.5. Change in Love of God

| | Matched Sample |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Mean change | 5.18 |
| P ($\alpha = 0.05$) | 0.00007* |
| Degrees of freedom | 34 |

*indicates statistical significance

Complete Sample Descriptive Statistics

The complete sample was initially analyzed by comparing the mean and standard deviation for scores addressing the love of God.

The mean love of God score for the complete sample from COR increased by 3.97, while the NP score increased by 3.62. The overall mean score also increased by 4.50. The standard deviation decreased for COR by 0.89 and by 1.41 for NP. Overall, the standard deviation decreased by 1.19. Table 4.6 shows the descriptive statistics from the complete sample associated with the love of

God score.

Table 4.6. Complete Sample Descriptive Statistics for Love of God

| | COR Pretest | COR Posttest | NP Pretest | NP Posttest | All Pretest | All Posttest |
|-------------|------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| n | 98.00 | 48.00 | 15.00 | 16.00 | 113.00 | 64.00 |
| Mean | 52.80 | 56.77 | 58.07 | 61.69 | 53.50 | 58.00 |
| SD | 10.52 | 9.63 | 7.90 | 6.49 | 10.34 | 9.15 |

Complete Sample Change

The complete sample was comprised of 113 pretests and sixty-four posttests. The mean score for love of God increased from 53.50 to 58.00. The one-tailed t-test (two sample assuming unequal variances) indicated that the difference of 4.50 between the means was significant ($p = 0.00159$) at the 0.05 level with 144 degrees of freedom.

Table 4.7. Change in Love of God

| | Complete Sample |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Mean change | 4.50 |
| P ($\alpha = 0.05$) | 0.00159* |
| Degrees of freedom | 144 |

*indicates statistical significance

Change in Love of Neighbor

The last fifteen statements of the survey were designed to explore a person's love of neighbor. Participants responded to statements such as "I know my spiritual gifts and use these in helping others." The changes in love of neighbor were analyzed as a matched sample and a complete sample.

Matched Sample Descriptive Statistics

The matched sample was initially analyzed by comparing the mean and standard deviation for scores addressing the love of neighbor.

The mean love of neighbor score for the matched sample from COR increased by 4.57, while the NP score decreased by 0.25. The overall mean score increased by 3.47. The standard deviation decreased by 0.09 for COR, 0.13 for NP, and 0.06 for all subjects. Table 4.8 shows the descriptive statistics from the matched sample associated with the love of neighbor score.

Table 4.8. Matched Sample Descriptive Statistics for Love of Neighbor

| | COR Pretest | COR Posttest | NP Pretest | NP Posttest | All Pretest | All Posttest |
|-------------|------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| n | 27.00 | 27.00 | 8.00 | 8.00 | 35.00 | 35.00 |
| Mean | 49.17 | 53.74 | 52.38 | 52.13 | 49.90 | 53.37 |
| SD | 1.80 | 1.89 | 7.69 | 6.10 | 8.99 | 9.05 |

Matched Sample Change

Thirty-five surveys were matched according to the birth dates of the participants. The mean score for love of neighbor increased from 49.90 to 56.97. The one-tailed t-test (paired two sample for means) indicated that the difference of 3.47 between the means was significant ($p = 0.0108$) at the 0.05 level with 34 degrees of freedom.

Table 4.9. Change in Love of Neighbor

| | Matched Sample |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Mean change | 3.47 |
| P ($\alpha = 0.05$) | 0.0108* |
| Degrees of freedom | 34 |

*indicates statistical significance

Complete Sample Descriptive Statistics

The matched sample was initially analyzed by comparing the mean and standard deviation for scores addressing the love of neighbor.

The mean love of neighbor score for the complete sample from COR increased by 5.34, while the NP score increased by 0.83. The overall mean score also increased by 4.90. The standard deviation for COR decreased by 1.43 and increased by 0.10 for NP. Overall, the standard deviation decreased by 1.64. Table 4.10 shows the descriptive statistics from the complete sample associated with the love of neighbor score.

Table 4.10. Complete Sample Descriptive Statistics for Love of Neighbor

| | COR Pretest | COR Posttest | NP Pretest | NP Posttest | All Pretest | All Posttest |
|-------------|------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| n | 98.00 | 48.00 | 15.00 | 16.00 | 113.00 | 64.00 |
| Mean | 49.98 | 55.32 | 55.80 | 56.63 | 50.75 | 55.65 |
| SD | 11.56 | 10.13 | 8.40 | 8.5 | 11.34 | 9.70 |

Complete Sample Change

The complete sample was comprised of 113 pretests and sixty-four posttests. The mean score for love of neighbor increased from 50.75 to 55.65. The one-tailed t-test (two sample assuming unequal variances) indicated that the difference of 4.90 between the means was significant ($p = 0.0014$) at the

0.05 level with 148 degrees of freedom.

Table 4.11. Change in Love of Neighbor

| | Complete Sample |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Mean change | 4.90 |
| P ($\alpha = 0.05$) | 0.0014* |
| Degrees of freedom | 148 |

*indicates statistical significance

The Context of Alpha

Differences were observed between the two churches that participated in this study. Although both churches resulted from new church plants, Church of the Resurrection began in 1990, while NorthPoint was started in 2004. COR has been offering the Alpha Course since April 2000 with over 2,800 people participating, and NorthPoint offered its first course in 2004 with sixteen participants. Almost 32 percent of participants from Church of the Resurrection were not members of the host church and approximately 18 percent were not members of any church. One person, or approximately 7 percent, of NorthPoint's participants indicated no church membership, and two, or 13 percent, indicated they were not members of the host church.

Demographically, the Alpha Courses from each church were very similar. In both churches, roughly two-thirds of the participants were female (COR-36%; NP-33%) and the average ages were 45 for COR and 52 for NP. Approximately 80 percent of participants from both churches had greater than a high school education and over 50 percent had a bachelor's degree or higher. Table 4.1 (p. 53) shows the demographic data for each church.

Change in Love of God

The observed positive change in the love of God score was highly significant for both churches' matched samples. Nevertheless, only COR demonstrated a significant positive change in the complete sample (see Table 4.12).

Matched sample. Twenty-seven surveys from COR were matched according to the birth dates of the participants. The mean score for love of God increased from 51.24 to 56.37. The one-tailed t-test (paired two sample for means) indicated that the difference of 5.13 between the means was significant ($p = 0.0010$) at the 0.05 level with 26 degrees of freedom.

Eight surveys from NP were matched according to the birth dates of the participants. The mean score for love of God increased from 53.63 to 59.00. The one-tailed t-test (paired two sample for means) indicated that the difference of 5.37 between the means was significant ($p = 0.0084$) at the 0.05 level with 7 degrees of freedom.

Complete sample. The complete sample from COR was comprised of ninety-eight pretests and forty-eight posttests. The mean score for love of God increased from 52.80 to 56.77. The one-tailed t-test (two sample assuming unequal variances) indicated that the difference of 3.97 between the means was significant ($p = 0.0126$) at the 0.05 level with 101 degrees of freedom.

The complete sample from NP was comprised of fifteen pretests and sixteen posttests. The mean score for love of God increased from 58.07 to 61.69. The one-tailed t-test (two sample assuming unequal variances) indicated that the difference of 3.62 between the means was not significant ($p = 0.0880$) at the 0.05 level with 27 degrees of freedom.

Table 4.12. Change in Love of God

| | COR Matched Sample | NP Matched Sample | COR Complete Sample | NP Complete Sample |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Mean change | 5.13 | 5.37 | 9.32 | 4.50 |
| P ($\alpha = 0.05$) | 0.0010* | 0.0084* | 0.0040* | 0.0880 |
| Degrees of freedom | 26 | 7 | 102 | 27 |

*indicates statistical significance

Change in Love of Neighbor

The observed change in the love of neighbor score was highly significant for COR but not significant for NP (see Table 4.13).

Matched sample. Twenty-seven surveys from COR were matched according to the birth dates of the participants. The mean score for love of neighbor increased from 49.17 to 53.74. The one-tailed t-test (paired two sample for means) indicated that the difference of 4.57 between the means was significant ($p = 0.0058$) at the 0.05 level with 26 degrees of freedom.

Eight surveys from NP were matched according to the birth dates of the participants. The mean score for love of neighbor decreased from 52.38 to 52.13. The one-tailed t-test (paired two sample for means) indicated that the difference of -0.25 between the means was not significant ($p = 0.4612$) at the 0.05 level with 7 degrees of freedom.

Complete sample. The complete sample from COR was comprised of ninety-eight pretests and forty-eight posttests. The mean score for love of neighbor increased from 49.98 to 55.32. The one-tailed t-test (two sample assuming unequal variances) indicated that the difference of 5.34 between the means was significant ($p = 0.0026$) at the 0.05 level with 105 degrees of

freedom.

The complete sample from NP was comprised of fifteen pretests and sixteen posttests. The mean score for love of neighbor increased from 55.80 to 56.63. The one-tailed t-test (two sample assuming unequal variances) indicated that the difference of 0.83 between the means was not significant ($p = 0.3939$) at the 0.05 level with 29 degrees of freedom.

Table 4.13. Change in Love of Neighbor

| | COR Matched Sample | NP Matched Sample | COR Complete Sample | NP Complete Sample |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Mean change | 4.57 | -0.25 | 5.34 | 0.83 |
| P ($\alpha = 0.05$) | 0.0058* | 0.4612 | 0.0026* | 0.3939 |
| Degrees of freedom | 26 | 7 | 105 | 29 |

*indicates statistical significance

Key Indicators

Each of the thirty survey statements was examined by rank ordering the score change to determine if any statement or statements stood out as possible key indicators of change in love of God or love of neighbor (see Appendix D). Three statements with the greatest change in mean stood out concerning a person's love of God and three statements with the greatest change in mean stood out concerning love of neighbor. Table 4.14 shows the change in the mean score for each possible key indicator.

Table 4.14. Possible Key Indicator Statements

| Love of God | Change in Mean Score |
|---|-----------------------------|
| I have an inner peace from God. | 0.49 |
| I take unpopular stands when my faith dictates. | 0.57 |
| I have inner contentment even when things are going wrong. | 0.46 |
| Love of Neighbor | |
| I pray for non-Christians to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. | 0.52 |
| I know my spiritual gifts and use these in helping others. | 0.53 |
| A high priority in spending money is to support God's ministries to others. | 0.49 |

Intervening Variables

Study findings were analyzed to see if the intervening variables of gender, age, educational level, and church participation impacted the change in scores. Correlations were computed comparing these factors with survey scores. No significant evidence was found indicating these variables impacted the findings.

Summary of Significant Findings

1. A significant number of participants in the Alpha Course indicated making a commitment of faith during the course.
2. The positive change in scores for both love of God and neighbor were significantly greater among those who indicated a first-time commitment of faith.
3. The positive change in scores for love of God was significant for both

the matched and complete samples.

4. The positive change in scores for love of neighbor was significant for both the matched and complete samples.

5. The positive change in scores for love of God was significant for both churches in the study; nevertheless, only Church of the Resurrection showed a significant positive change in the love of neighbor score.

6. Six questions emerged as possible key indicators of a change in a person's love of God.

7. No significant evidence was discovered to indicate the intervening variables of gender, age, educational level, or church participation affected the observed changes.

8. A positive relationship exists between the Alpha Course and changes in a person's love of God and neighbor.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this project was to evaluate the Alpha Course as a catalyst for faith transformation. For the purposes of this study, faith transformation was operationalized as changes in a person's love of God and neighbor. As discussed in Chapter 2, conversion is a process of transformation in which persons are changed by the power of God and grow in love of God and neighbor. As Peace observes, Christian conversion involves a process of revealing the need for a relationship with God, the beginning of the relationship through Jesus Christ, and the living out of this new relationship in service to God and witness to others (Peace 101). In today's ever-changing culture, pastors and churches are looking for ways to reach persons, who are either inside or outside the church, and help them experience faith transformation. The findings of this study suggest that Alpha is an effective tool for enabling such change.

Major Findings and Reflections

Chapter 4 presented the quantitative findings of the research concerning faith commitment, change in love of God, and change in love of neighbor. These findings suggest that Alpha is a catalyst for faith transformation.

Faith Commitment

The Alpha Course is promoted as a tool for evangelism. As such, Alpha gives participants many opportunities throughout the course to make a faith commitment to Jesus Christ. Each week, either in the talk presented or as a part of the small group discussion, individuals are given the opportunity to give their lives to Christ. As presented in Chapter 4, this study discovered that a

majority of participants (72 percent) made a faith commitment to Jesus Christ during the course. The majority of commitments were characterized as recommitments of faith. Nevertheless, five persons indicated they made an initial commitment of faith during the Alpha Course. One person who reported an initial faith commitment commented, “Since coming to this church and Alpha I have an enjoyment of worshiping God and a desire to read the Bible and learn more. I have a new love for God and a peacefulness I’ve never felt before. I have a desire to discuss the Bible with others.”

This study strongly suggests that participants in the Alpha Course do make commitments of faith as a result of the course. This finding concurs with a 2000 survey of Presbyterian USA churches that offered the Alpha Course. Of the sixty-two churches surveyed, 69 percent of the churches reported that participants made a personal commitment to Christ (Alpha Course Survey).

Given the nature of the two participating courses, most of these were recommitments of faith rather than first-time commitments. As reported in Chapter 4, 93 percent of all participants claimed to be a part of the Christian tradition and over 80 percent were members of a church. As evidenced by the overall positive change in love of God and neighbor, these individuals seem to have grown, as Wesley describes, from “faith to faith” (Works of John Wesley 7: 266). In other Alpha Courses with a greater concentration of unchurched people, more first-time commitments could be observed.

Alpha seems to have several characteristics that mirror Rambo’s stages of conversion. These characteristics likely contribute to the observed commitments of faith. First, Alpha provides a “context” of hospitality and friendship intended to make the Alpha experience nonthreatening. This

environment facilitates the person's journey toward a commitment (Rambo 165). Alpha also invites participants on a "quest" and encourages honest questions about the Christian faith (167). Allowing for questions enables persons to explore answers to the problems they may face. One Alpha participant observed, "Alpha is a good place to ask even the most elementary questions." During the Alpha Course, participants have an "encounter" with the presenter of the Alpha Course and the small group leader (167). Finally, Alpha allows for "interaction" between the course leaders and the individual. These relationships help form the foundation for the participant's new life in Christ (167). Another participant observed, "The fellowship of my small group brings me great comfort." These factors of context, quest, encounter, and interaction combine to create a crucible in which faith commitments are enabled.

Love of God

Wesley describes the love of God as one of the marks of an altogether Christian (Works of John Wesley 5:79). As reported in Chapter 4, participants in Alpha experienced a significant increase in their love of God. Three statements emerged as possible key indicators of this change: I have inner peace from God; I take unpopular stands when my faith dictates; I have inner contentment even when things are going wrong. The prominence of these statements suggests that participants experienced the increased love of God through a greater willingness to live out their faith and a greater sense of peace and contentment in their lives.

This change reflects Wesley's understanding of the change from the faith of a servant to the faith of a son. The change in scores as well as the prominent statements that emerged suggest that people have moved from a "spirit of

bondage unto fear” to a faith characterized by “the spirit of childlike love” (Works of John Wesley 7:255).

These changes also seem to mesh with Peace’s perspective on the process of conversion in the New Testament. Peace describes part of this process as involving a new perspective and understanding about God, a response by turning toward God and a new relationship to God (101). These types of changes can be observed in the various accounts of conversion in the New Testament, especially in the life of Paul. The significant change in love of God would seem to indicate such a change in perspective and a response have occurred.

Love of Neighbor

The second mark of an altogether Christian is the love of neighbor. This love is exhibited in kindness shown toward others as well as a generosity toward those in need (Works of John Wesley 5:84). As reported in Chapter 4, participants in Alpha experienced a significant increase in their love of neighbor. As with the love of God, three statements emerged as possible key indicators of this change: I pray for non-Christians to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. I know my spiritual gifts and use these in helping others. A high priority in spending money is to support God’s ministries to others. The prominence of these statements suggests that participants experienced the increased love of neighbor through a greater concern for non-Christians, a greater desire to use their gifts in service to others, and a greater willingness to give financially.

The accounts of conversion in the New Testament were marked by a radical love of others and generosity toward those in need. The early Christian

community was engaged in proactive evangelism and care of the needy and disenfranchised. As Peace indicates, this change was marked by a life of witness and service to all (101). The observed changes in love of neighbor would seem to indicate that participants in Alpha experience a change in their attitude and actions toward others. The change in love of neighbor for the Alpha participant seems to be marked by a life of generosity, service, and witness.

Unexpected Findings

As reported in Chapter 4, persons making a first-time commitment of faith demonstrated a much larger increase in love of God and love of neighbor than the matched sample. While the discovery of a greater increase among those making a first-time commitment was not unexpected, the degree of change was unanticipated.

Limitations of the Study

A disparity existed between the number of pretest and posttest surveys. This disparity between the matched and complete samples was likely due to two factors. First, Alpha Courses typically experience some dropout over the ten-week period; consequently, some of the participants who submitted a pretest were not present for the posttest. Secondly, the month and day of birth was used to identify each survey and to match the pretest and posttest. Nevertheless, some participants chose not to fill in the birth date, and others incorrectly gave month and year rather than month and day. Another coding method such as the last four digits of the participants, Social Security number might have been more effective.

The studied Alpha Courses had few unchurched participants. This factor likely accounts for the small number of first-time faith commitments. Including

courses with greater numbers of unchurched participants would have strengthened the study.

Future Research

Several possibilities for further research emerged during the project.

Context

As reported in Chapter 4, different changes were observed during the Alpha Course of each church. The Alpha Course at NP only demonstrated a significant positive change for love of neighbor in the matched sample. COR demonstrated a significant positive change in both love of God and neighbor across both samples.

In this case the context of Alpha appears to affect the outcome of faith transformation. A possible factor that may explain this observation is the difference in unchurched participants from each Alpha Course. None of the participants at NP were unchurched, while COR had almost 17 percent who were unchurched. As reported in Chapter 4, those who made an initial faith commitment to Christ showed a greater increase for both love of God and neighbor. Therefore, this factor possibly lowered the overall change in the NP sample. Additional research involving Alpha Courses with similar concentrations of unchurched people could further explore the issue of context.

Key Indicator Statements

Further research could explore each of the identified statements to determine if they provided key indicators to change in love of God and neighbor.

The Unchurched

Given the noticeably greater change that occurred among those who made a first-time commitment of faith, further research might be conducted on

Alpha Courses that are predominately reaching unchurched people.

Ministry Impact

Many stories have been written about the changed lives that have resulted from the Alpha Course. This research not only affirms the value of the Alpha Course as a tool for evangelism but also affirms Alpha's potential for helping persons to grow in their faith.

My experience with Alpha has been one of excitement as well as challenge. In previous churches, I have seen the impact that Alpha can make on the lives of unchurched people as well as those connected with a congregation. I have seen the lives of those without faith in Christ radically transformed and those with a lukewarm faith set aflame with love of God and neighbor. This study has confirmed my conviction that Alpha is one of the most effective strategies for both reaching the unchurched and transforming the lives of believers. I also believe one of Alpha's greatest by-products is the potential to renew congregations and refocus communities of faith on the Great Commission. In my current church, we have struggled with the leadership necessary to sustain a consistent Alpha experience and, therefore, have only offered the course twice over the last three years. Nevertheless, knowing Alpha's potential from previous experience and seeing the results of this study have given me the determination to press on and give Alpha the opportunity to transform lives and the church.

APPENDIX A**Alpha Course Survey**

This survey is anonymous; however, so that each survey can be uniquely coded, please provide the 4 digits representing your month and day of birth: _ _ _ _
 Example: If your birthday is January 1: 0 1 0 1

For each of the following statements, please indicate where you would place yourself on a scale from 0 to 5, if 0 stands for “does not apply at all” and 5 stands for “applies completely.”

| | | | | | | | |
|-----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | I believe that the God of the Bible is one in essence, but distinct in persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. | I believe that God is actively involved in my life. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. | I desire Jesus Christ to be first in my life. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. | I thank God daily for who God is and what God is doing in my life. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. | I have an inner peace from God. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. | I seek to grow closer to God by listening to God in prayer. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. | I exist to know, love and serve God. _____ | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. | No task is too menial for me if God calls me to do it. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. | Those who know me best would say that I love God. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. | I believe the Bible has decisive authority over the way I live my life. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. | I believe that nothing I have done or do can earn God’s forgiveness, approval and love. _____ | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. | I take unpopular stands when my faith dictates. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. | I have inner contentment even when things are going wrong. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. | I regularly study the Bible to find direction for my life. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. | I control my tongue. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Comment [SBY6]: Possible replacement: Because of my faith, I have meaning and purpose in life.

Comment [SBY7]: Change to read: God’s forgiveness; approval; love; relationship with God?

| | | | | | | | |
|-----|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 16. | I believe all people are loved by God, therefore I should love them too, regardless of race, creed, wealth or place in life. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. | When I am faced with a crisis, I find hope in my faith in Jesus Christ. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. | God's grace enables me to forgive people who have hurt me. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. | I believe the community of true believers is Christ's body on earth. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. | I am known as a person who speaks words of kindness to those in need of encouragement. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 21. | I pray for non-Christians to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 22. | I believe that a Christian should live a sacrificial life, not driven by pursuit of material things. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 23. | I believe it is important to share my faith with my neighbor because Christ has commanded me to do so. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 24. | I am involved in the lives of the poor and suffering. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 25. | I allow other Christians to hold me accountable for my actions. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 26. | I know my spiritual gifts and use these in helping others. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 27. | I give my time to serve and help others in my community. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 28. | A high priority in spending money is to support God's ministries to others. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 29. | I keep my composure even when people or circumstances irritate me. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 30. | I am known for not raising my voice in anger. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Comment [SBY8]: Changed from "God calls me to be involved in the lives of the poor and suffering."

Comment [SBY9]: Added "in anger"

Comment [SBY10]: Other Possible replacements:
 I am a person who is spiritually committed.
 I feel the need to experience spiritual growth in my daily life.
 My faith is involved in every aspect of my life.

APPENDIX B**Demographic Questions**

Please check the appropriate box or answer the question in the space provided.

1. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female
2. Age: _____
3. Highest Degree Completed:

| | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> High School | <input type="checkbox"/> Technical School | <input type="checkbox"/> Associates |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bachelors | <input type="checkbox"/> Masters | <input type="checkbox"/> Doctorate |
4. How long has it been since you attended a church or synagogue worship service not including weddings, funerals or special holidays such as Easter, Christmas or Yom Kippur?

| | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 – 6 Months | <input type="checkbox"/> 6 – 12 Months | <input type="checkbox"/> More than 1 year |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|
5. Do you consider yourself a part of:

| | |
|---|------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> The Christian religious tradition | Denomination: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Some non-Christian religious tradition | Please indicate: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No religious tradition in particular | |
6. How important to you is your religious faith?

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Very important | <input type="checkbox"/> Fairly important | <input type="checkbox"/> Not at all important |
|---|---|---|
7. Are you a member of a church or synagogue? ☐ Yes ☐ No
8. Are you a member of this church? ☐ Yes ☐ No

APPENDIX C

Alpha Experience Questions

Please check the appropriate box or answer the question in the space provided.

1. Have you attended a church service since starting Alpha (not including weddings, funerals or holidays)? ☐ Yes ☐ No
2. Please indicate the number of Sundays you currently attend church in a typical month: ☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4
3. Are you a member of this church? ☐ Yes ☐ No
4. Are you a member of any church? ☐ Yes ☐ No
5. Did you make a faith commitment to Jesus Christ during Alpha?
☐ Yes ☐ No
6. If you responded "Yes" to question 5, how would you describe this commitment?
☐ First-time commitment of faith in Christ
☐ Recommitment of faith in Christ
7. Please indicate the sessions that you attended. Check all that apply.
☐ Introductory or Celebration Dinner (Christianity. Boring, Untrue, Irrelevant?)
☐ The Weekend Retreat

| | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 – Who is Jesus? | <input type="checkbox"/> 6 – How Does God Guide Us? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2 – Why Did Jesus Die? | <input type="checkbox"/> 7 – How Can I Resist Evil |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3 – How Can I Be Sure of My Faith | <input type="checkbox"/> 8 – Why and How Should I Tell Others? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4 – Why and How Should I read the Bible? | <input type="checkbox"/> 9 – Does God Heal Today? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 5 – Why and How Do I Pray? | <input type="checkbox"/> 10 – What About the Church? |

8. Please rate your impressions of the following on a scale of zero to five where "0" stands for completely unsatisfactory and "5" stands for completely satisfactory:
 ____ The Alpha Course talks
 ____ The small group
 ____ The Alpha weekend
9. What impact has Alpha had on your life? (Please use the back of this page)

If you would be willing to participate in a follow-up phone interview please provide your name, address and telephone number.

APPENDIX D

Rank Order of Survey Statements

| All Surveys | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------|--|--------------|------------|---------------|-------------|--------------|-----------|--|--|
| <i>Love of God</i> | | | | | | | | | |
| | | Pretest Mean | Pretest SD | Posttest Mean | Posttest SD | Mean Change | SD Change | | |
| 12. <i>zzz</i> | <i>I take unpopular stands when my faith dictates.</i> | 3.13 | 1.20 | 3.70 | 0.89 | 0.57 | -0.31 | | |
| 5. <i>z</i> | I have an inner peace from God. | 3.68 | 1.09 | 4.17 | 0.83 | 0.49 | -0.26 | | |
| 13. <i>zzz</i> | I have inner contentment even when things are going wrong. | 3.10 | 1.11 | 3.56 | 0.94 | 0.46 | -0.17 | | |
| 10. <i>zzz</i> | I believe the Bible has decisive authority over the way I live my life. | 3.59 | 1.21 | 3.95 | 0.93 | 0.36 | -0.28 | | |
| 9. <i>z</i> | Those who know me best would say that I love God. | 3.56 | 1.14 | 3.90 | 0.95 | 0.34 | -0.19 | | |
| 14. <i>zzz</i> | I regularly study the Bible to find direction for my life. | 2.50 | 1.56 | 2.84 | 1.18 | 0.34 | -0.37 | | |
| 4. <i>z</i> | I thank God daily for who God is and what God is doing in my life. | 3.74 | 1.21 | 4.08 | 0.96 | 0.33 | -0.24 | | |
| 15. <i>zzz</i> | I control my tongue. | 2.67 | 1.32 | 2.94 | 1.10 | 0.27 | -0.23 | | |
| 11. <i>zzz</i> | I believe that nothing I have done or do can earn God's forgiveness, approval and love. <i>z</i> | 2.72 | 1.96 | 2.98 | 2.05 | 0.27 | 0.09 | | |
| 8. <i>z</i> | No task is too menial for me if God calls me to do it. | 3.99 | 1.12 | 4.23 | 0.90 | 0.25 | -0.21 | | |
| 6. <i>z</i> | I seek to grow closer to God by listening to God in prayer. | 4.18 | 1.00 | 4.42 | 0.79 | 0.24 | -0.21 | | |
| 7. <i>z</i> | I exist to know, love and serve God. <i>z</i> | 3.91 | 1.04 | 4.09 | 0.99 | 0.19 | -0.05 | | |
| 1 | I believe that the God of the Bible is one in essence, but distinct in persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. | 4.30 | 1.10 | 4.47 | 0.97 | 0.17 | -0.13 | | |
| 2. <i>z</i> | I believe that God is actively involved in my life. | 4.32 | 0.88 | 4.44 | 0.77 | 0.12 | -0.11 | | |
| 3. <i>z</i> | I desire Jesus Christ to be first in my life. | 4.57 | 0.68 | 4.61 | 0.70 | 0.04 | 0.02 | | |
| <i>Love of Neighbor</i> | | | | | | | | | |
| 26. <i>zzz</i> | I know my spiritual gifts and use these in helping others. | 2.90 | 1.46 | 3.44 | 1.04 | 0.53 | -0.43 | | |
| 21. <i>zzz</i> | I pray for non-Christians to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. | 3.18 | 1.54 | 3.70 | 1.24 | 0.52 | -0.30 | | |
| 28. <i>zzz</i> | A high priority in spending money is to support God's ministries to others. | 2.93 | 1.27 | 3.42 | 1.12 | 0.49 | -0.14 | | |
| 25. <i>zzz</i> | I allow other Christians to hold me accountable for my actions. | 3.18 | 1.35 | 3.62 | 1.16 | 0.44 | -0.20 | | |
| 19. <i>zzz</i> | I believe the community of true believers is Christ's body on earth. | 3.82 | 1.24 | 4.27 | 0.86 | 0.44 | -0.38 | | |
| 22. <i>zzz</i> | I believe that a Christian should live a sacrificial life, not driven by pursuit of material things. | 3.65 | 1.16 | 4.08 | 1.00 | 0.43 | -0.16 | | |
| 23. <i>zzz</i> | I believe it is important to share my faith with my neighbor because Christ has commanded me to do so. | 3.26 | 1.26 | 3.69 | 1.17 | 0.43 | -0.10 | | |
| 24. <i>zzz</i> | I am involved in the lives of the poor and suffering. <i>z</i> | 2.53 | 1.36 | 2.95 | 1.16 | 0.42 | -0.20 | | |
| 27. <i>zzz</i> | I give my time to serve and help others in my community. | 2.97 | 1.30 | 3.34 | 1.17 | 0.37 | -0.13 | | |
| 18. <i>zzz</i> | God's grace enables me to forgive people who have hurt me. | 3.68 | 1.04 | 3.98 | 0.85 | 0.30 | -0.19 | | |
| 17. <i>zzz</i> | When I am faced with a crisis, I find hope in my faith in Jesus Christ. | 4.04 | 0.99 | 4.28 | 0.81 | 0.24 | -0.18 | | |
| 29. <i>zzz</i> | I keep my composure even when people or circumstances irritate me. | 3.10 | 1.06 | 3.30 | 0.99 | 0.20 | -0.07 | | |
| 20. <i>zzz</i> | I am known as a person who speaks words of kindness to those in need of encouragement. | 3.93 | 0.84 | 4.02 | 0.86 | 0.09 | 0.02 | | |
| 16. <i>zzz</i> | I believe all people are loved by God, therefore I should love them too, regardless of race, creed, wealth or place in life. | 4.55 | 0.67 | 4.55 | 0.69 | -0.01 | 0.02 | | |
| 30. <i>zzz</i> | I am known for not raising my voice in anger. <i>z</i> | 3.17 | 1.23 | 3.13 | 1.28 | -0.04 | 0.05 | | |

Bold - indicates a possible key indicator statement

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